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Rationale and Objectives of the Research

As far as Thai society is concerned, a large number of Chinese immigrants had come to settle down in various parts of the country with different patterns of life and backgrounds over hundreds of years. They had been assimilated with native Thais and by and large integrated into the Thai community so much that it is rather difficult for us to distinguish those native Thais from their Chinese compatriots. Given this kind of advantage in terms of basic human resources, we find that our society still has not done a good enough job in bringing out the potential and capacity of those Chinese descendants. Many Thais also have more chances of learning the Chinese language from different institutions in Thailand when compared with their Chinese counterpart whose chances of studying the Thai language are so slim. Nevertheless, it proves to be even harder for us to find a Thai who can master and excel at employing the Chinese language.

Hence, the Chinese Studies Center, Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, believes it is time for the Thai people in general to turn our attention to all relevant causes of the above-mentioned problems, regardless of the excuse in terms of degree of difficulty between the two languages. We had better find out whether or not our educational system which seems to put more value on diplomas than the real knowledge and intellect is part of the problem. What are the strengths and weaknesses in the learning and teaching of the Chinese language in Thailand? How true is it about the tales/explanations of failure concerning the current state of learning and teaching the Chinese language in Thailand? How large is the number of people involved in this field? How does the curriculum in each system and level look like? How are those Chinese courses, their learning hours and textbooks used? What about the quality of both the Thai and the Chinese teachers? And so on. We should report all the facts and figures concerning the learning and teaching of the Chinese language in each system and at each level to our nation’s educational administrators and teachers in order to improve the quality of Chinese language teaching and learning in Thailand in the future.

Our research methods on the teaching and learning of the Chinese language in higher education institutions in Thailand consist of document research and workshop (held on March 14, 2008, with 45 institutions participated). We relied heavily on the data obtained from questionnaires together with telephone interviews, site visits, internet searching, and answers from experts on certain points. This research is part of “the teaching and learning of the Chinese language in Thailand” research project (5 copies) which takes one year and four months to complete.

Historical Background; Policy and Strategy; Administration and Management, Thai-Chinese Cooperation in the Teaching and Learning of the Chinese Language in Higher Education Institutions

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As a result of globalization, the learning of foreign languages has become necessary and inevitable and is regarded as a key to success in both study and career development.

There are a total of 19 foreign languages taught in Thailand, namely, English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Russian, Portuguese, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Khmer, Burmese, Lao, Malay, Arab, Hindi, Pali-Sanskrit, and Greek. Only English and Chinese are taught at every level and in every region. However, the teaching and learning of the Chinese language in Thailand has quite a unique historical background of its own. Prior to 1972, Thailand had not established any diplomatic relation with China, and the Thai government merely allowed the study of the Chinese language at the primary school level, but never at the secondary school level. The emergence of the teaching and learning of Chinese at the university level came with the vision of Dr. Khien Theerawit, Professor at the Department of International Relations, Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University. His analysis of both global and regional political situations at the time led to the idea of finding the ways to help prepare Thailand to face new challenges, and training personnel with the Chinese language to better handle and buttress Thailand’s foreign policies. Thus, amidst the tight political atmosphere with the fear of Communism and the Cold War spreading worldwide, in 1972 the Faculty of Political Science offered for the first time (in a Thai university) Chinese-as-a-foreign-language courses to its students.

Another leading figure at the time was Professor Rong Sayamanondha, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University. He realized the importance of Chinese studies and set out a developing plan and direction by sending his faculty staff to study the Chinese language in the United States of America. And the first person to receive a PhD degree in Chinese was Associate Professor Prapin Manomaivibool. She was the founder of the Chinese Section and later was also Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University. Currently, she is the first President of the Chinese Language Teachers’ Association of Thailand. At the national level, she has served as the Counselor for the establishment of Chinese curriculum at higher education institutions in Thailand. At the international level, she has been appointed Advisory Committee of the Li Fang-kuei Center, established with the purpose of maintaining excellence in research and teaching of the Chinese language. We can thus say that Associate Professor Dr. Prapin Manomaivibool constructed a solid foundation in the study of the Chinese language at higher education institutions in Thailand.

The Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, offered Chinese as its selective course and minor course in 1973 and 1977, respectively. In 1981, the Chinese Section opened its Chinese major at the undergraduate level for the first time. It was not until 1996 that the Chinese Section established its first master degree in the Chinese language. In 2004, it then offered another master degree in Chinese as a Foreign Language to help solve the problem of lacking qualified Chinese language teachers at the time. June 2009 will see the opening of Thailand’s first PhD program in the Chinese language at Chulalongkorn University, administered by the Chinese Section in close academic cooperation with Peking University to help train and fulfill the need of qualified Chinese language personnel at higher education institutions in Thailand.

In addition, due to the increase in students’ demand, the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, has expanded its scope of Chinese study within its own
campus as well. For example, it offers Chinese as selective foreign-language courses for students majoring in International Relations, Faculty of Political Science, and as free electives for students from other faculties. It also offers Chinese courses for students at the BBA International Program, Faculty of Commerce and Accountancy, and the EBA International Program, Faculty of Economics, etc. Since the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, is a major player in resolving the problem of lacking qualified Chinese language personnel in Thailand, the Office of Chinese Language Council International (HANBAN) has posted two Chinese experts at Chulalongkorn University each year.

It is believed that the Thai cabinet resolution concerning the stipulation of foreign-language teaching policies and schools passed on February 4, 1992, helped elevate the status of the Chinese language to be comparable to English, French, German, and Japanese. Prior to that time, only 10 higher education institutions were pioneers in offering the Chinese curriculum in Thailand. At present, the teaching and learning of the Chinese language at the Faculty of Arts has expanded immensely when compared with the establishment of the curriculum at the inception of the Chinese Section. This is because students equipped with Chinese language are still badly needed in the job market. Even during the time of the financial crisis in 1997, those who know the Chinese language did not lose their jobs. Nowadays, recent graduates majoring in Chinese have no problem finding their jobs as well.

From the survey of Chinese language teaching among higher education institutions during October 2004 to March 2005 by Bureau of International Cooperation Strategy, Commission on Higher Education, there were 73 institutions in Thailand offering Chinese curriculum as major, minor and selective courses, with 16,221 undergraduates, and 23 graduate students.

At present, the popularity of Chinese language study is only second to that of English and Chinese is being taught at every level and in every region. Despite such fast growth, the four decades of ups and downs in Chinese language teaching and learning due to both internal and external factors have become major “historical obstacles” to achieving the goal of enhancing Chinese language teaching and learning competency of the nation. Thus, we encounter problems such as inconsistent junctures at each educational level, the rise of “rookie” administrators, prematurely taking charge of higher education institutions, etc.

The policy and strategy for the teaching and learning of the Chinese language at higher education institutions also reflect both the positive and the negative roles of the Chinese language as set out by Thai society. Hence, Chinese can be viewed favorably as either a language of Chinese-identity inheritance, or a language useful for the development of Thailand’s economy and society. Or it can be regarded unfavorably as either a language posing a threat to national security, or a language apparatus to disseminate communist ideology. All these roles are closely tied to the policies stipulated by the Thai government. Education therefore serves the useful purpose of maintaining governmental authority.

While other foreign languages adhere continuously to the educational policy of being foreign languages, Chinese is the only language that the Ministry of Education transfers its policy decision-making to the Secretariat of the National Security Council. Thus, the policies on the Chinese language always fluctuate and vary according to national security factors, international relations, the demand of the
people, and the state of economy. Once the relevant factors change, the policy gets
altered, resulting in the depreciation of and discontinuity in Chinese as a foreign
language. The so-called “3 levels of zero” is the state of teaching and learning
Chinese in Thailand, reflecting the problem of “junctures” at each level. That is to
say, beginners’ classes are offered time and again at the primary school level, at the
secondary level, and at the university level.

Besides, the measures employed by the government can be in the form of tight
control to meet the needs of the Assimilation Policy, for instance, the restriction on
the teaching of the Chinese language merely at the primary school level once China
had undergone social revolution in 1949, the closing of Thailand’s only Chinese
curriculum at the secondary level at Indhara Suksa School in 1953, etc. Or the
measures can be in the form of full support in order to serve the needs for enhancing
the competitiveness and competence of the nation at all levels in the globalizing world,
for example, the national education plan in 1992 in which Chinese language study is
allowed at all levels. That Chinese is now positioned to help enhance the
competitiveness of the nation might have come from a proactive approach by
Thailand’s higher education institutions to prepare themselves for the “Asian
Century”—with China and India as keys players at world stage.

As a result, the main contents in the development of the teaching and the
learning of the Chinese language at universities from 1992 to 2010 have ranged from
allowing Chinese as a major or minor subject at the undergraduate level to expanding
the number of Chinese learners without any limit according to the institutions’
capacity and the students’ demand. The third stage of development aims to create an
economic-based society with the Chinese language as its means of communication. It
also requires that 20% of those undergraduates must have good quality and pass the
standards given proportionately. There are also measures and budgets ascribed to
such development strategy.

The teaching and learning of the Chinese language is related to the politics of
China as well. All countries including Thailand that have diplomatic relations with
China must tacitly accept the One China Policy as advocated by Mainland China and,
following the 2758 resolution, endorsed by the United Nation Assembly in 1971.
From then on, any relation or communication with Taiwan has become a sensitive
issue and is quite limited in forms to avoid any misunderstanding. Thus, policies on
Chinese language study between Thailand and Taiwan have developed with restraint
despite Taiwan being a strong economic powerhouse.

Furthermore, the difference in the use of Chinese characters, namely
simplified forms employed by Mainland China and traditional forms used by Taiwan,
has resulted in the so-called “Politics of Ideographs,” two writing systems vying to
gain grounds in Thai society. Unlike Singapore, which officially adopted the use of
simplified forms, the Thai authority has never announced its policy on Chinese
characters. Consequently, the Chinese language is the only foreign language in the
admission/national examinations that allows students to choose between the two
writing systems. This is probably because Thailand employs the same strategy of
ambiguity as the United States’, letting nature take its own course. However, such
kind of character-straddling would bring trouble to Thai learners before the problem
gets resolved.

The administration and management of the teaching and learning of the
Chinese language in higher education institutions can be divided into two levels,
namely, micro-management concerning the teaching and learning arrangements of the
Chinese language at higher education institutions, and macro-management concerning the administration of structures that impact the training and nurturing of Chinese learners in Thai society as a whole, for instance, the policy that Chinese is one of the foreign languages used in the admission examinations.

At the micro-management level, public universities offer Chinese major based on their academic capacity and market demand. Private universities, on the other hand, establish Chinese major following market and students’ demands. The offering of Chinese as minor and selective subjects at public and private universities depends on the demand of learners and relate to their major subject. At present, there are also more and more Chinese curriculums (International Programs) offered by higher education institutions in Thailand. The establishment of international programs is used as a mechanism in the development of institutions and as a “shortcut” to the international system. It provides a channel for exchange with notable universities in order to match international standards. It also brings in a lot of revenues to the institutions. However, we still do not know the difference in terms of accomplishment between students in the regular curriculum and those in the international curriculum.

Thai universities do not have a policy on the appropriate size of foreign-language classrooms. The classroom is mostly arranged according to the number of students. Nevertheless, most universities have their own self-study resources, language labs and clinics, multimedia, computers, and extra-curriculum activities. As for instructors, both public and private universities use public announcement and examination in their recruitment of faculty staff, but the applicants must hold at least an MA degree in Chinese. However, regional universities might allow those with BA graduates in Chinese to apply, then giving them financial support to further their study.

The Chinese aptitude test or HSK has gained more and more importance in Thailand. In the beginning, people used HSK as part of the documents submitted to further their study in China or to apply for the Chinese government’s scholarship. Nowadays, several higher education institutions begin to see HSK as part of the documents used in student’s application to graduate level programs. In the foreseeable future, HSK will be used as the criterion in the management of Chinese education in Thailand as well as a standard testing of Chinese competency, just like the use of TOEFL in the case of English competency.

At the macro-management level, the Thai authority in 1998 has elevated the status of Chinese as one of the foreign languages used in the admission examinations in addition to French and German. There are two phases of Chinese examination in the higher education institutions in Thailand. The first phase from 1998 to 2005 involved the so-called “Entrance” examination. The second phase beginning in March 2006 concerns the so-called “Central Admissions” examination. Only 222 students participated in the first Chinese examination in October 1998. But in the latest examination held in March 2008, the number of students has reached a high level of 4,647.

Three major observations regarding the admission examinations in Thailand are as follow:

(1) Many faculties in the social sciences, such as the Faculty of Political Science, the Faculty of Law, the Faculty of Communication Arts, and the Faculty of Social Science use the Chinese A-NET scores in their examination.
(2) There are 23 Chinese-major curriculums which do not use the Chinese A-NET scores in their examination.

(3) There are 11 curriculums in the Humanities with major subjects other than Chinese that use the Chinese A-NET scores in their examination.

Since the Chinese examination is used for admission into higher education institutions, not for achievement tests of the study of Chinese language at secondary school level, its degree of difficulty and function of categorization meet the standard criteria and adhere to the standardization that reflects the average scores of other foreign languages.

Thai universities typically pay attention to the development in the teaching and research skills their faculty staff, not that of their administrative skills. Hence, many young instructors still lack administrative experiences and do not know in which direction to develop their administrative skills. Thus, it is incumbent upon Thai universities to help build their administrative skills by preparing them in advance before taking the rein of administrative work. On the contrary, too early an administrative work can cause more harm than good to the young faculty members, who still need to acquire and stabilize their academic knowledge. Thus, Thai universities should have diverse systems of KPI for their faculty staff.

Students at different levels have different objectives. Thus foreign language competence is still considered ineffective. The purpose of those learning foreign languages at the primary school level is to meet the demand of their parents. Learners of foreign languages at the secondary school level aim at succeeding in the admission examinations. Those who study foreign languages at the university level would like to use it in their future career. That is, the discontinuity of the educational goal at each level causes the lack of unity in their development direction. Nevertheless, university students should emphasize speaking and listening skills.

In the past, the Thai-Chinese cooperation in the teaching and learning of the Chinese language in higher education institutions was between the Ministry of University Affairs of Thailand and China, with many MOUs on collaboration between the Thai working units and China from 1978 to 2002. The cooperation between the Ministry of Education of Thailand and China began in 1996, resulting in three operational plans within two years from 1998 to 2003. Its principle contents focus on the exchange of students and faculty members, educational exhibitions, etc. Following the major re-structuring of the Ministry of Education in 2003, the Ministry of University Affairs became part of the Ministry of Education and is under the new name of Commission on Higher Education. Its academic collaboration with China is also included in the academic collaboration between the Ministry of Education and China.

The new era of cooperation between the Ministries of Education of Thailand and of China concerning the higher education institutions has a much wider scope in comparison to the beginning stage of their collaboration. There are three essential MOUs, namely: (1) MOU on the cooperation between the Ministries of Education of Thailand and of China concerning the higher education institutions; (2) MOU on the mutual acceptance of both Thai and Chinese diplomas done in 2007; and (3) collaborative framework on the cooperation between HANBAN and the Thai Ministry of Education in the teaching and learning of the Chinese language in higher education institutions done in 2006.
The expansion of Thai-Chinese cooperation in the past 5 years (2003-2008) along with the establishment of 11 guest Confucius Institutes—supported by HANBAN and located inside the Thai universities—has triggered suspicion on the part of some Thais as to the real intention of the Chinese. This is probably due to persisting structural problems with regards to the study of Chinese within Thai society; hence, time will bear witness to such intention.

Current State of the Teaching and Learning of the Chinese Language; Curriculum-Study Hours-Subjects; Chinese Textbooks and Teaching Materials concerning Higher Education Institutions

The current state of the teaching and learning of the Chinese language, which manifests itself in the rapid growth in numbers of Thai learners and institutions carrying their own Chinese curriculum, has resulted from external factors such as strong state support and pressures from the Chinese economic growth, together with internal factors such the inclusion of the Chinese language in admission examinations.

In July 2008, there are a total of 165 public and private higher education institutions, including Rajabhat Normal University and Rajamangala University of Technology. Among them, 79 institutions (about 48%) offer Chinese as major, minor, or selective subjects.

As of July 2008, there are all together 20,800 students studying Chinese in higher education institutions. Thai nationals teaching Chinese in the 2008 academic year can be categorized into 244 permanent teachers and 73 guest instructors. For Chinese native speakers, the figures of permanent and guest teachers are 238 and 76, respectively.

Our survey finds that Thai instructors teaching Chinese have different kinds of workload. They teach an average of 2.8 courses per week, 11.9 hours per week, and approximately 51% of the time is used for class preparation and homework correction. Other obligations include administrative works, departmental and faculty meetings, and advising undergraduate students. Some instructors are also interested in doing research but they do not have enough time. The number of students in each classroom varies. But classes with 21 to 80 students constitute 50% of all classrooms. Also, most students consider both the Thai and the Chinese instructors to have equally good teaching skills. For the Thai instructors, most universities have certain measures to evaluate their teaching and research works. They also provide opportunities for Thai instructors to strengthen their Chinese knowledge. However, only a few administrators (15%) use the raising of salary, yearly bonus, or opportunity to further study at a higher level as a reward to their instructors. A large number of administrators do not provide any reward to the Chinese language teachers.

Almost all the teachers of Chinese nationality at the primary and secondary schools are arranged through the help of HANBAN. On the contrary, most university instructors of Chinese nationality are directly invited or employed by the universities themselves, or they come according to MOUs on cooperation between universities. A certain number of instructors come through the help of the Taiwanese government. Most instructors of Chinese nationality have either BA or MA degrees—only a few have no diploma. Chinese instructors cannot speak the Thai language at the start of their teaching, and it is understood that a majority of them who did not answer to the questionnaire do not have any training on teaching. The education backgrounds and teaching subjects of the Chinese instructors are also different. However, the teaching time and time for homework correction of the Chinese instructors are not as much as
Thai instructors’ since they do not have to deal with administrative works, etc. The incomes of Thai and Chinese instructors are more or less the same.

The curriculum-study hours-subjects at the higher education institutions in Thailand for regular Chinese program follow the standard curriculum criteria as issued by the Ministry of Education in 2005. The B.A. program which takes 4 years to complete must have no less than 120 credits. But the 5-year undergraduate Chinese program should have no less than 150 credits. The total credits for the MA program and PhD program should be no less than 36 and 48, respectively, allowing for differences in curriculum designs. Our survey finds that only five institutions offer evening or part-time curriculums. All of them are popular among learners due to the interesting subjects they offer.

A large number of universities pay equal attention to each language skill, with no emphasis on any skill in particular. Most universities treat students with prior knowledge of Chinese the same way as they treat those with no Chinese background. Only a few universities offer placement tests and arrange suitable courses for those students with prior knowledge or allow students to take courses at a higher level. Still, we find that students enjoy a great amount of freedom in choosing their own courses.

Our survey also finds that most universities that offer Chinese as major, minor and selective courses have a wide range of difference in terms of their standards. The data obtained from university administrators and instructors concerning the difference between Chinese characters (字) and vocabulary (词) is equally not so reliable. It is possible that those answering the questionnaire did not understand the question, or that they could not distinguish between the two concepts. Besides, several universities have more than one working unit dealing with the evaluation and assessment of Chinese study. Regarding the Chinese writing system, universities teaching simplified system of Chinese characters constitute 51.5% of the total number of institutions under survey. Those with the teaching of traditional characters constitute only 1.6% of the total. Some universities use simplified characters in their textbooks but also learn about the traditional forms, and vice versa. Each of them constitutes around 12.5%. 21.9% of all institutions under survey view the simplified and the traditional forms as equally important. In terms of the pronunciation of Chinese, a majority of universities teach the pinyin system.

The higher education institutions give relatively more “power” to instructors in the choosing of Chinese textbooks as long as their contents adhere to the course descriptions in the curriculum. Survey data shows that public universities prefer to use textbooks produced by themselves rather than ready-made textbooks. However, private higher education institutions, including Rajabhat Normal University and Rajamangala University of Technology prefer employing ready-made textbooks. In any case, the criteria for “producing textbooks” or “choosing textbooks” is based on the instructors’ consideration and judgment.

There are certain advantages and disadvantages with respect to either the producing or the choosing of textbooks. Since both processes are considered vital to the nurturing of undergraduate students, the universities should appoint a committee or Chinese experts as “babysitter” to examine the basic quality of textbooks, allowing Thai instructors to strengthen their academic ability and have more confidence in teaching their students.
The criteria for the selection and evaluation of textbook are based on the number of universities using it (regardless of its quality). Our analysis of the textbooks has taken into account the standard criteria set forth by the task force committee of Chinese Studies Center. Of the three textbooks, the Shiyong Hanyu Keben fares better in terms of its linguistics, production, and substance qualities. Nevertheless, all of them share limitations in terms of their application in the context of Thai society. In addition, most Thai instructors of the Chinese language believe it is a good idea to have Thai experts on Chinese cooperatively compiling textbooks with the help from native Chinese experts. And no one suggests that “each university should produce its own textbooks.”

With respect to Chinese teaching materials, many universities use tape cassette, DVD and VCD. Other kinds of media like satellite/cable TV, card index, pictures, SKQS corpus and E-Learning are equally employed.

During the past two years, we find more and more students with prior knowledge of the Chinese language. Both students currently studying Chinese and those already graduated have concurred that they made the right decision in choosing to study Chinese. They believe that learning Chinese will help improve their quality of life. In spite of this, Thai students are still facing many problems, including the lack of diligence, perseverance, or determination especially when compared with their Chinese counterparts. Hence, the study of foreign languages by Thai students is considered ineffective.

Our data also shows that an average of 56.6% of graduates with Chinese major (during 2006-2007) can read Chinese daily newspaper, and an average of 50.9% understand the radio and CCTV television programs. In all, most Chinese learners realize the long-term benefits of Chinese language study and think that it can help them secure a better job and earn more money in the future.

External Support

As part of state support, the Thai government has an official policy to promote the teaching and learning of the Chinese language in each system and at every level since 2005. An effective “grassroots” administrator has to put more effort in finding resources from his/her own university and from the government. Our survey indicates that state support comes especially in the form of scholarship, training, and study trip, and that public universities receive more of this kind of support than private universities do. In comparison, there is still less assistance from the private sector.

Regarding the cooperation between Thailand and China, there have been a large number of cooperative projects between the peoples of the two countries. Thailand also receives notable assistance in various aspects from China, and it will continue to look like this for a long period of time.

As for the questionnaire on the Confucius Institute (CI), the 11 CIs have mentioned the merit of having a CI at their institutions together with certain worries over cultural domination. They also noticed that the budget used in several activities of the CIs did not come solely from China, but the host universities have to make certain financial contributions as well. Some universities that wish to have their own CIs think of the benefits that they can get. Others that do not want to establish CIs might worry about political interference or consider themselves “not yet ready.”
rather concise reply might reflect the idea that the establishment of CIs should be done with caution, balancing the pros and cons; thus, universities that want to host CIs should take into account all these reasonable precautions.

**Observations; Opinions; Suggestions from University Administrators and the Research Team**

As seen from our survey, both the instructors and administrators of the Chinese curriculum have proposed observations on topics like curriculum standard, the use of Chinese characters, problems on teaching personnel, etc. They also provide suggestions in order to help improve the teaching and learning of the Chinese language at the university level.

Our research team also proposes topics of interest such as the roles of universities as leaders in society, curriculum and subjects, standard of Chinese knowledge textbooks and teaching materials, etc. We disagree with the Commission on Higher Educations’ strategic plan for enhancing Chinese language teaching and learning competency at all levels (2006-2010) which requires that 20% of all those undergraduates “must have good quality and pass the standards given proportionately.” In our view, the requirement of enhancing quality at such rate is easily said than done when compared with the increase in quantity. As for the great amount of financial support from China, we better use it to improve the quality of the teaching and learning of the Chinese language so as our students won’t be wasting their time, thus, conforming properly to the policy of boosting our national interests and benefits.

As far as the Chinese teaching staff and personnel are concerned, leaders in the field of Chinese language teaching and learning should be reminded that in the long run each institution needs to rely on itself by nurturing and training its own Chinese instructors and teaching personnel. And the application for Chinese volunteer teachers should be considered simply a temporary measure.

**Keyword:** Teaching and Learning, Chinese language, Higher education institutions, curriculum, textbooks, teaching materials, Patchanee Tangyuenyong, Suree Choonharuangdej