
Muay Thai Diplomacy: Thailand's Soft Power Through Public Diplomacy

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Abstract: *Public and cultural diplomacy are tools for states to enhance their soft power in international affairs. Sports diplomacy is becoming an increasingly important arena for states to enhance their image among foreign publics and increase their country's visibility via the attractiveness of their cultural asset. This article explores Thailand's cultural diplomacy by the support given by the Thai state in order to make Muay Thai (Thai boxing) an official Olympic sport. The role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Muay Thai athletes will be examined to find how the Thai state is attempting to increase its soft power by cultural sport diplomacy.*

Keywords: *Thai boxing, Thailand diplomacy, Public diplomacy, Cultural diplomacy, Soft power, Sports diplomacy*

1. Introduction

Muay Thai, also known as Thai boxing, has gained a global admiration and recognition as the national martial art and sport of Thailand. More than its fascinating combat techniques, Muay Thai is enriched with its cultural values, fabricated along the history of the Thai nation. Today, Muay Thai has evolved from its origin of battlefield and obtained the utilitarian multiplicity in fitness, entertainment, sport, self-defence, and so on, not only in its country of origin but worldwide. It is also recognised by the Thai state as a

source of soft power, thus, used as a tool for cultural diplomacy (Sukontasap, 2018). This inquiry of the 'Muaythai Roadshow' project is five-fold: Muay Thai of Thailand; Modern Utilities of Muay Thai; Muay Thai in Cultural Diplomacy; Milestone Analysis; and Future of Muay Thai Diplomacy. Firstly, Muay Thai would be examined in the cultural and historical perspective to reveal its distinctive identification with Thailand. Then, its utilitarian multiplicity in today's society would be exemplified. Afterwards, an explanation of the 'Muaythai Roadshow' project, emphasise the good practices, and suggest the improvement. Then, the achievement in Muay Thai diplomacy. Lastly, I would project the future of Muay Thai diplomacy from my point of view.

2. Origins of Muay Thai

Muay Thai, or Thai Muay, means Muay of the Thai. In Thai, the term '*muay* (มวย)' means a form of unarmed combat or boxing. It is believed to have a Sanskrit root of '*mav* (मव्)' meaning to bind together or to offensively encroach (Thammathatch, 1931). Thai people use this term indiscriminately for all kinds of boxing, e.g., *Muay Bamar* for Burmese *Lethwei*, *Muay Khmen* for Cambodian *Pradal Serey*, or *Muay Chin* for Chinese *Wushu Sanshou*. The addition of the word 'Thai' after 'Muay' is to distinguish Thai-style of boxing from others. Muay Thai is known as the "Art of Eight Limbs", characterised by the combination of blows from two fists, two elbows, two knees, and two feet/shins. The ninth part is the head, which is not used in the modern Muay Thai. Muay Thai today derives its techniques from various regions across the country, mainly *Muay Tha Sao* from the North, *Muay Korat* from the Northeast or Isan, *Muay Chaiya* from the South, *Muay Lopburi* from the Central, and *Muay Phala Sueksa* from the Department of Physical Education (Department of Physical Education [DPE], 2016). More than its techniques, Muay Thai is imbued with Thai cultural values reflected in the ritual of *Wai Kru*, paying homage to

the spiritual and living teachers, performed by the *Nak Muay*, Muay Thai practitioners, before their match through the aesthetic and stretching *Ram Muay*, Muay Thai dance, accompanied by the mystical overture of *Pi Muay* Thai instruments. In Thai culture, the Wai Kru ceremony is part of all fields of knowledge, especially in the arts, to honour the teachers as the guardians and passers of the derived wisdoms. Buddhist-influenced teachings are also an integral part of the training of the mind to increase *samadhi* (concentration) and *sati-sampajañña* (consciousness-awareness) and to decrease *mana* (arrogance) and *atta* (ego), thus, performing better in training and fighting due to having a clear mind. Muay Thai practitioners are, therefore, trained in both physically and mentally.

The interpretation of Muay Thai as a martial art of Thai people, its origin could be dated back to the origin of Thai people. This could be traced back to the earliest anthropological evidence of the Tai ethnicity in Guangxi, China, from around 400 BCE (Qian, 2013). However, the association of Thai people to their pre-historic ancestors might sound far-fetched. Thus, I would begin the historical analysis of Muay Thai from the Kingdom of Sukhothai, located in today's upper-central Thailand, that is formally accepted by Thai state, taught in Thai schools, as the dawn of the Thai nation in the mid-13th century after the long vasalage under the Khmer Empire (Saraya, 2010). The evidence of Muay Thai in this era was found in the Chinnakanmalipakorn manuscript mentioning that King Ramkamhaeng of Sukhothai, when young, used to study the martial arts of all forms with Sukadanta the hermit at Samokhon mountain in Lopburi (Champapan, 2019). Moreover, as described in the stone inscription No. 1, Sukhothai had joined numerous wars both to protect and expand its territory, thus, Muay Thai is assumed to be among other martial arts in the warfare (Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre [PMCSAC], 2018). Later in the mid-14th century, Ayutthaya, another Thai city-state of Chao Phraya river basin, rose to power and became a successive state to Sukhothai after merging with it. During this era, Muay Thai is

assumed to have gained popularity across classes and become an 'entertainment sport' among Thai people. According to the Ayutthaya chronicle, King Sanphet VIII (1661-1709) was a Muay Thai virtuoso and liked to incognito join Muay Thai matches at the local festivities (Klaphachon, 2018). Moreover, the Ayutthaya court also established *Krom Thanai Lueak*, a department of the Muay Thai veterans, to be the unarmed guards closest to and directly receiving the order from the king. Another Muay Thai legend is not of royalty but has received much respect, *Nai Khanom Tom*, who is believed to be, according to the Ayutthaya chronicle, the Thai prisoner of war in Burma that used Muay Thai to defeat 10 Burmese Lethwei fighters. Muay Thai also showed in the account of Simon de la Loubère, the French envoy to Ayutthaya in 1687, who described that "wrestling and fighting with fists and elbows make a profession for the performers" and in the royal sponsored fête there were several entertainments, like "the wrestlers and people who fight with fists" (La Loubère, 1770).

3. Modern Utilities of Muay Thai

Muay Thai is largely enjoyed by Thais as sports entertainment. Underlying the pure sports and entertainment aspect of Muay Thai is a greater utility of fitness, training and monetary value. Muay Thai is practiced for fitness utility at Muay Thai gyms as well as fitness centres in Thailand and overseas, for example, Fitness First's Muay Thai group class in Thailand, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Jordan, Qatar, and UAE (Fitness First, 2020). According to the Sports Authority of Thailand, in Thailand, there are 5,100 Muay Thai gyms (Small and Medium Industrial Institute [SMI], 2018). Overseas, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there are 3,869 Muay Thai gyms in 36 countries (Nirattrakul, 2013). This suggests the economic value of Muay Thai for entrepreneurs, Muay Thai instructors, as well as producers of Muay Thai equipment both in Thailand and overseas.

Muay Thai as a cultural art form manifests its aesthetic in choreography and literature. Cultural performances of Muay Thai usually highlight the solemn physical movements of Muay Thai performers through meaningful *Wai Kru* ceremony as well as the *Mae Mai* and *Luk Mai*, major and minor techniques. These techniques have poetic and meaningful names, inspired by Thai literature and the observation of nature. For example, *Jorrakhe Fad Hang* (crocodile sweeps its tail) compares the leg of the boxer to the tail of a crocodile, and *Hanuman Thawai Waen* (Hanuman presents a ring) derives its name from a scene of the *Ramakien* epic. Artistry of Muay Thai is also captured in cinematography. Tony Jaa starring, Ong-Bak and Tom Yum Goong movies have undoubtedly brought Muay Thai into the new millennium with greater international appreciation for the Thai martial art.

4. Muay Thai: Sports, Public Diplomacy & Soft Power

Cultural diplomacy is a form of public diplomacy which Nye argues is a marker of high culture which is credibly transmitted by governments for consumption by foreign governments and foreign publics (Nye 2008, 107). Unlike traditional diplomacy that is conducted only between governments, public diplomacy aims to interact with foreign publics, in order to build or enhance awareness, recognition, perception of familiarity, appreciation, amicability to a nation and a familiarity with its culture. Nye posits that states undertake public diplomacy as means of enhancing its soft power (Nye 2004). In particular Nye argues that soft power rest upon three variables, culture, political values and foreign policy (Ibid). He future notes that sports indeed play a strong role in shaping a countries image at the international level (Ibid, 24) If successfully deployed and managed soft power co-opts those who consume and engage in the soft power tool to the extent that the country's image is enhanced to foreign publics. Noya argues that Nye's soft power must be distinguished in its applicable form from its counterparts of military or economic power which are classified as hard powers.

Noya's argument is clear in its assertion that soft power is measurable and indistinguishable from hard power if it is perceived by the subject/s as being intrinsically attractive. In essence Noya argues that hard power is exercised externally and expressed as attractiveness upon the subject whereas soft power is internalized subjectively establishing preference then constructed objectively as part of the subject in their perceptions of the power transmitter.

Lukes also confers the intrinsic nature of internalizing of perceptions and mobilizing of soft power as being effective in that the subject is susceptible to it. Lukes and Noya both attribute soft power affectability to the legitimization of the power source/product in the ability of the subject to internalize the ideology of ideas, which is based on reputation of the power source, effective benefits of the power product or method of application of power. Sölter further stresses the assumption that western states success in soft power application as being embodied in ideas and values that can only be achieved by exchange or rather transference in the propagation of beliefs. Nye describes what he states as the second face of power as the ability to get others to want or desire what you yourself desire, or what he terms as co-option (Nye 2005, 56). The conception of co-option should be considered further in light of the source of power generation, which within the framework of desires and wants points towards both an external motivational factor of power in prestige or social legitimacy and internal motivations for internalization of those external power products (Nye 2010). Colson's insight into Nye's soft power discourse makes a critical distinction between Nye's core conceptions of co-option and cooperation. Co-option is not about getting actors to do what they might not want or 'bringing them on board' but rather it points towards agents coming from a higher or dominant power position of interests and/or resources and the maintenance of this by attracting others to your source of power (Colson 2009). Within the context of this paper sports are the essential characteristic of Thailand's cultural diplomacy which is

being promoted internationally. Abdi et. al. (2019) have found that sports are a credible means of soft power production for states. They find that there are three primary sources of cultural transmission of the countries soft power which are hosting/participating in prestigious events such as the Olympics, human capital such as prestigious athletes and sports products (Abdi et. al. 2019). Germane to this paper is Thailand's policy to get Muay Thai into being an official Olympic game and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs promotion of Muay Thai abroad in order to increase its visibility and prestige. The MFA has engaging lengthy promotion of not only Muay Thai but also well-known Muay Thai boxers as sports ambassadors for this cultural diplomacy policy which Copeland has identified as being part of transformational diplomacy in the new century whereby foreign ministries are tasked with ever more nuanced tasks (Copeland 2009, 102). This is an important aspect in that Thai athletes are playing a major role in the export of Muay Thai globally and as Cull has argued, individuals play a crucial role in being diplomats and ambassadors of public diplomacy (Cull 2010, 15). The ability of a country to project a positive image of its country via the Olympic Games is considered highly prestigious, by having an Olympic sport which is associated with a country would be an important source of Thai soft power. This aspect will be analysed in this paper whereby Pigman and Dubinsky argue that having athletes as ambassadors of a nations' brand enhances significantly the association of image to place (Dubinsky 2019, Pigman 2014).

5. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs promotion of Muay Thai

Cultural diplomacy is the conduct of public diplomacy through the means of culture: a set of tangible and intangible social products co-created and shared by the people of a particular society or nation. Due to its distinctively Thai identity and the variety of its utilitarian potential, Muay Thai is recognised by the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs of Thailand as valuable tool of cultural diplomacy (Sukontasap, 2018).

For decades, the Royal Thai Embassies around the world have been proudly organising the performance of Muay Thai and other traditional national arts of Thailand such as Thai cooking, fruit carving, Thai garland making, Thai dancing, Khon, Thai music for foreign audiences, mostly during the annual 'Thai Festival' event that showcases Thai arts and culture (Thairath Online 2018). Then, in 2012, the Cultural Relations Division, Department of Information, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, initiated a project that devoted the promotional effort and budget solely for Muay Thai, 'Muaythai Roadshow' project, aiming to increase overseas recognition and cultural appreciation of Muay Thai (Saranrom Radio, 2018). The project is also to support the Ministry's mission of diplomacy for cultural relations and development affairs (Saranrom Radio, 2019). Since 2012, the MFA has brought Muay Thai teams from Thailand to demonstrate the authenticity of Muay Thai and hold Muay Thai workshops for the foreign public in various countries in Asia, Europe, Australia, Middle East, South America, and Africa (MFA, 2012; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019). According to Master "Din" Wittawat Kasom, the Muay Thai team leader, Japan and Portugal were to be added to the list if the 2020 project was not cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Ka-som, 2020). Watching the experience-sharing talks and reading the Ministry news about the 'Muaythai Roadshow' projects in Senegal, China, Australia, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, Russia, Israel, Jordan, Chile, Brazil, Mexico, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Russia, Kenya, Ethiopia, Mozambique, South Africa, Croatia, Hungary, Czech, and Germany, I extract the core activities of the project: demonstration; workshop; Public Relations; and visiting senior officials, then, to emphasise the good practices of these activities (MFA, 2012; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019).

Demonstration of Muay Thai, visualising the strong yet aesthetic image of Muay Thai, is a good opening activity as it attracts the attention of the spectators, provides the correct input about Muay Thai, and inspires the audience to practice Muay Thai. First, the demonstration is the performance, thus, its entertaining elements help maintain the attention of the spectators throughout the show. When performed on the well-equipped stage or in the theatre, theatrical techniques of lighting, sound, and narration could create an ambience that the theatre industry uses to suspend the disbelief and strict critical thinking among the audience, allowing them to be absorbed into the show. The performance could also have a story line to urge the audience's expectation for the next sequence in the story. More importantly, the demonstration could correct the perception of Muay Thai that might be much distorted in the country of destination. The spectators take the first step in learning correct Muay Thai from seeing the show. The Ministry's recruitment of the Muay Thai demonstration team from Thai Fight's Muay Thai performance competition ensures the quality and authenticity of the performers (Saranrom Radio, 2019). Nevertheless, more than entertaining and educating, the performance could inspire the audience to practice Muay Thai. In South Africa, Master Din was impressed by the young African women cheering in joy when the solo female Muay Thai performer bravely battled and gained victory over the men (The Cloud, 2019). The workshop after the demonstration was enthusiastically overwhelmed with intrigued young women who feel empowered by the performance.

Muay Thai Diplomacy: Thailand's Soft Power Through Public Diplomacy



Young women joining Muay Thai workshop in South Africa (MFA, 2019).



Muay Thai demonstration in Mozambique (MFA, 2019).



Engaged young audience in Mozambique (MFA, 2019).

Thus, the show design could play an important role in urging the interest to practice Muay Thai among the audience.

Demonstration is the appetiser; workshop is the main course. The workshop allows them to try Muay Thai by themselves, engaging the audience further through the learning-by-doing activity. The Ministry held workshops for different groups of audience: beginners; intermediate-advanced practitioners; professional instructors; sports colleges and armed forces training schools; elites; disabled people; and youths at risk. For beginners, basics were taught such as posture, guarding, and simple blows. Nonetheless, the participants had a chance to learn the cultural aspects of Muay Thai and try the art of eight limbs, using their fists,

elbows, knees, and feet/shins. Intermediate-advanced participants learnt the Mae Mai and Luk Mai (major and minor techniques) and more cultural features of Muay Thai such as Wai Kru. In Kuwait, there were intermediate-advanced practitioners of other martial arts participating the workshop. The Muay Thai instructors, then, adjusted and developed from their existing martial art skills to enable their Muay Thai capability (Saranrom Radio, 2016). For some Muslim countries, male-female contact is strictly prohibited. Thus, in Kuwait, female attendees were separately trained with female Muslim trainers (Saranrom Radio, 2016). Professional workshops were for the Muay Thai instructors. The workshop usually took place at the local Muay Thai gyms. Then, the Ministry could build the relationships with the overseas Muay Thai gyms, which play a major role in disseminating the culture of Muay Thai in their countries. In Oman, Grand Master Sanae Tubtimtong shared with the local Muay Thai instructors the advanced techniques, teaching methods, cultural values of Muay Thai, and the role of Muay Thai teacher in training both physics and mind of the students (Saranrom Radio, 2016). Muay Thai workshops were also held at the sports colleges, e.g., Józef Piłsudski University of Physical Education in Poland, and armed forces training schools, e.g., Escuela de Infanteria in Chile (MFA, 2016; 2018). Introducing Muay Thai martial sport and art to those institutions increases the interest in Muay Thai among the potential practitioners of athletes, sportspersons, police, and military. Moreover, it brings the opportunity of putting Muay Thai into the curriculum of those institutions. The special case of Muay Thai workshop was held for Her Royal Highness Princess Iman bint Al-Hussien, sister of His Majesty King Abdullah II ibn Al-Hussein of Jordan (MFA, 2017). This high-level conduct of cultural diplomacy aimed at a very elite group in society, strengthening bilateral relations. The Ministry also held Muay Thai workshops for people with disabilities, for example, at Kaunas Disabled Youth Day Centre in Poland and Bram Fischer Centre in South Africa (MFA, 2016). This is an example of universal inclusivity dimension of Muay Thai. As people are

differently-abled physically and mentally, teaching methods should be co-created between Muay Thai instructors and the disabilities specialists to enhance the Muay Thai learning experience of the disabled people and to seek the possibility to enable Muay Thai for physical and mental therapy utility. Lastly, the Ministry reached out to the youths at risk and offered Muay Thai as one of the life choices. In Brazil and Kenya, in collaboration with 'Fight for Peace', which is an international NGO that promotes the role of boxing and martial arts for youth development, the Ministry held the Muay Thai workshop to train the local martial art instructors and youths in the communities at risk, and donate Muay Thai equipment to the community gyms as well (MFA, 2018; 2019).



Muay Thai workshop for the disabled people in South Africa (MFA, 2019).



Respect as one of the core values of Muay Thai (MFA, 2016).



Muay Thai workshop for military officers and cadets at Escuela de Infanteria in Chile (MFA, 2018).



Muay Thai workshop in collaboration with Fight for Peace in Kenya (MFA, 2019).



Muay Thai intermediate-advanced level workshop in Croatia (MFA, 2019).



Grand Master Sanae Tubtimtong training Her Royal Highness Princess Iman bint Al-Hussien of Jordan (MFA, 2017).

Public Relations of the project is no less important than on-site activities as the news and media helps extend the visibility of Muay Thai and the message of good-intentioned purpose of the activity to a wider audience. The Ministry had contacted both local and Thai media to help spread the awareness of the project. The local media is the most important tool to increase the awareness among the foreign public. The number of the event participants might be limited by the venue space, travel cost and time, amount of

equipment and instructors, or other limitations, but the media could reach the wider foreign public of that country: those existing Muay Thai enthusiasts in the country as well as those with no knowledge of Muay Thai. A good example of local media use could be drawn from the trip to Lithuania, where the Ministry managed to get the high-rating national television and radio channel: the Lithuanian National Radio and Television (LRT) to broadcast the activities (Saranrom Radio, 2016). On the first day, the Thai ambassador brought a Muay Thai performer to demonstrate the Wai Kru on a popular morning news programme 'Labas Rytas, Lietuva (Good Morning, Lithuania)'. The following day, the Thai ambassador and a Muay Thai master were also invited to cook Thai food in a famous cooking television show 'Maistas ir Aistros (Food and Passion)' (MFA, 2016). The continued and repeated projection of the positive image of Thainess, although unrelated activities, for two days on the same channel could imprint the good perception of Thailand on the mind of the audience. The air time on mainstream media in Lithuania is especially important as the country has only 20 Thai residents, thus, very low people-to-people contact. Although Thai audience might not be the primary target of the project but raising their awareness about the Ministry's effort to promote Muay Thai overseas inform them the Ministry's agenda and motivate their support. The audio-visual media has brought Thai people to virtually join the project and urge their participation in the effort, evoking their interest to practice Muay Thai as a proud national martial art. An example of success is the production of the entertaining and inspiring semi-documentary video content of 9.45 minutes with concise but sufficient information by The Cloud that has reached 679,010 views on YouTube and 70K views on Facebook, as of December 2020 (The Cloud, 2019).



Director General of the Department of Information, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, and the Thai Ambassador to Mexico meeting Mr. Carlos Padilla Becerra, President of the National Olympic Committee of Mexico (MFA, 2018).



Thai Ambassador and Muay Thai master at a famous Lithuanian television cooking show (MFA, 2016).

Besides the main activity of promoting Muay Thai among the foreign public, the Ministry still conducted the traditional diplomacy. The representatives of the Ministry, thus, arranged to meet the local politicians, sports authorities, senior officials of the visited countries to create mutual understandings and foster cooperation in promoting the practice of Muay Thai in their communities and countries. Moreover, the Ministry representatives also met the members of the National Olympic Committee of those countries to solicit their votes to include Muaythai in the upcoming 2024 Olympics in Paris. The mission to promote Muay Thai to the Olympics also aligns with the Ministry of Tourism and Sports's 'Strategic Plan for Muaythai towards the Olympics 2017-2021' that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is assigned the responsibility "to increase the visibility of Muay Thai overseas" (Saranrom Radio, 2018).

6. Milestone Analysis

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Royal Thai Embassies across the globe have recognized Muay Thai as a valuable cultural asset of Thailand and its role in cultural diplomacy (Sukontasap,

2018). Thus, Muay Thai has been chosen to be performed, along with Thai music, Thai dancing, etc., for foreign audiences to promote Thai culture. In 2012, the Cultural Relations Division, Department of Information, then, initiated a project to dedicate the promotional effort and budget especially for Muay Thai, to increase the foreign recognition, appreciation, and practice of Muay Thai. On 6 December 2016, Muay Thai has been approved by the International Olympic Committee or IOC to be an eligible sport for the Olympic Games (IFMA, 2016).

The milestone for the Muay Thai diplomacy has been achieved undeniably due to the effort of the Ministry. Nonetheless, this remarkable achievement is also largely owed to the effort of the International Federation of Muaythai Amateur or IFMA, in improving the global standard of Muaythai as an IOC-preferred style of amateur sport (IFMA, 2019). Also, Muay Thai has to be renamed as Muaythai to dilute its attachment to the Thai nation and become an international sport as the IOC prefers. After the gaining the IOC recognition as the sole governing body of Muaythai, IFMA merged with the World Muaythai Council, gaining the recognition from the Thai state as the highest governing body of Muay Thai worldwide. Bridged by the Ministry of Tourism and Sports's 'Strategic Plan for Muaythai towards the Olympics 2017-2021', the Ministry of Foreign Affairs began its formal cooperation with IFMA in pushing Muay Thai towards the Olympics by increasing visibility of Muay Thai among the foreign public and gaining favour for Muay Thai from members of the National Olympic Committee of other countries. These tasks align greatly with the Ministry's existing effort on Muay Thai diplomacy, synthesising a synergy for the national effort for the inclusion of Muay Thai in the Olympics. Furthermore, the Ministry also had supported the work of IFMA by sending its Muay Thai demonstration team to perform at the opening ceremony of the IFMA World Muaythai Championships 2018 in Cancún, Mexico, after finishing the 'Muaythai Roadshow in Chile,

Brazil, and Mexico’ (MFA, 2018). Such careful plan of the Ministry to organise the ‘Muaythai Roadshow’ in the same time period and continent of IFMA’s event allowed the Muay Thai demonstration team to perform at the opening ceremony of the IFMA World Muaythai Championships 2018 with the reduced travel cost and time, created the synergy for the ‘Muaythai towards the Olympics 2017-2021’ working team as a whole. The next milestone to achieve is the inclusion of Muay Thai in the Olympics, Paris 2024, and have worldwide participation of young Muay Thai enthusiasts at the *Olympic Muaythai*.

7. Future of Muay Thai Diplomacy

According to the Ministry statement, ‘Muaythai Roadshow’ project supports the Ministry’s mission of diplomacy for cultural relations and development affairs (Saranrom Radio, 2019). The perception of Muay Thai diplomacy as a source of soft power lays stress on the role of Muay Thai in leveraging the foreign popular favourability for Thailand’s stance in the international community. Seeing through the soft power paradigm, the goal of the ‘Muaythai Roadshow’ project is limited to the gains: the achievement of the passionate admiration among the foreign public for Muay Thai and the return of soft power to Thailand. However, through the efforts to enable Muay Thai as a tool for development, the Ministry has advanced Muay Thai diplomacy to be more than just a source of soft power for Thailand but a movement for social development. The work of the Ministry, especially in partnership with the NGOs and civil societies, e.g., Fight for Peace, has developed Muay Thai diplomacy into a *force for good*, engaging in the development affairs for the foreign publics. By seeing Muay Thai diplomacy through the altruistic paradigm, the purpose of Muay Thai diplomacy is, rather than the soft power for Thailand, the social contribution from Thailand to the world. By mobilising Muay Thai diplomacy as a force for good, the Ministry is still ensured the return of soft power for Thailand but could focus more on the means, the actual process

of cultural diplomacy, and actively engaging in the development affairs. In other words, in the force for good paradigm, Muay Thai diplomacy becomes, rather than goal-oriented in acquiring soft power, process-oriented in global development, sustainably sustaining its relevancy in the global community. Muay Thai diplomacy, then, becomes another CSR, country social responsibility, project of Thailand.

8. Conclusion

Muay Thai is the national martial art of Thailand which features many cultural elements of Thainess whether it be the Buddhist-influenced mental training, humble and solemn *Wai Kru Ram Muay* pre-match ritual, the *Pi Muay* Thai music accompaniment throughout the match. The promotion of Muay Thai by the Thai government through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Tourism Authority of Thailand have helped push Muay Thai onto the world stage as an easily recognizable art form of Thailand. The successful support of Thai embassy networking worldwide has enabled Muay Thai to potentially be an Olympic sport and a strong soft power asset of Thailand. The cultural sports diplomacy engaged in through the MFA has enabled this Thai cultural art, sports and war medium to be become a distinct and recognizable form of Thainess and Thailand in the international arena.

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