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## UK APPOINTS NEW ENVOY

**B**rian Davidson is to succeed Mark Kent as the UK ambassador to Thailand in September 2016 after spending much of the interim period learning the Thai language. He is currently the UK's consul-general in Shanghai and was previously in the same position in Guangzhou. He has good contacts with senior Chinese business gurus, a fact of great importance in view of growing trade between China and the UK and Beijing's increasing diplomatic and political significance throughout pan-Asia. British ambassadors these days are seen as front-line promoters of British economic interests overseas.

A Cambridge University law graduate, Mr Davidson joined the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 1968 as a desk officer for Eastern Europe. However, he undertook Mandarin language training and became a second secretary at the British embassy in Beijing from 1988 to 1992, the first of several Chinese positions. He also served as an analyst on terrorism and international security and held senior positions in the British diplomatic presence in Vilnius and Canberra.

In September 2014 Mr Davidson married his



American boyfriend, Scott Chang, in a ceremony officiated by the British ambassador at his residence in Beijing. Same-sex weddings are legal in UK law and can be performed at 22 British consulates worldwide, including mainland China (but not Hong Kong), Russia and Azerbaijan. Neither China nor Thailand recognizes gay marriages and Thailand currently refuses to allow same-sex weddings even in foreign embassies. Some commentators speculate that this could change in the near future.

At the time Mr Davidson wrote in the social media, "It means that, finally, our family

and friends can witness the moment we commit to love and cherish each other. I am very proud that the law in the United Kingdom today affords me the same rights as any other British national to be married to whomever I love."

He takes up his position as British ambassador in Bangkok following many changes in the diplomatic world in recent years. Some services, for example the issuing of passports and visas, have been semi-privatized and significant financial cuts imposed by London have found their mark. Thus, as regards the British embassy in Bangkok, many more

decisions about individuals are made in London than used to be the case. Boosting British trade is now seen as taking centre stage. The UK is already Thailand's biggest trading partner throughout the European Union. Mr Davidson will be expected to maintain and expand that prominence.

The new ambassador will also need to take note of the complaints by many British nationals in Thailand about the reduction in front-line, consular services. Several social media sites popular in Thailand frequently demonstrate the negative feeling, caused in part by the

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