

Thailand's Strategic Role in Advancing the Thailand-China Community with a Shared Future: Opportunities and Challenges for Sustainable Regional Development

Amorn Wangukkarangkul

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Suratthani Rajabhat University, Surat Thani 84100, Thailand

(Corresponding author's e-mail: amorn.wan@sru.ac.th)

Received: 21 January 2026, Revised: 27 February 2026, Accepted: 2 March 2026, Published: 7 April 2026

Abstract

This article analyzes Thailand's strategic role in advancing the Thailand-China Community with a Shared Future (CSFM), focusing on sustainable regional development within evolving bilateral relations. Through qualitative documentary analysis of bilateral agreements, policy frameworks, and cooperative projects, the study examines the development, concepts, and implementation of the CSFM strategy. Despite the growing body of scholarship on Thailand-China relations, existing literature has focused predominantly on bilateral economic and trade dimensions, with limited analytical attention to Thailand's proactive agency in shaping and operationalizing the CSFM framework as an emerging middle power. This article addresses this gap by providing a systematic analysis of Thailand's strategic positioning across multiple cooperation dimensions. The findings reveal that Thailand-China relations, rooted in strong historical and cultural foundations, have evolved into a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership. Thailand demonstrates a proactive role in aligning its national development strategy with China's global initiatives, particularly the Belt and Road Initiative, through concrete cooperation in economics, trade, investment, infrastructure, security, and socio-cultural exchanges. However, significant challenges emerge, including concerns over Chinese influence from large-scale investments, maintaining balanced relations with major powers, and political system differences. Simultaneously, substantial opportunities exist in economic growth, infrastructure and technological advancement, regional connectivity, and promoting regional stability. The article recommends Thailand enhance transparency in cooperative projects, diversify risks, maintain strategic equilibrium, proactively promote national interests, and leverage its ASEAN role. Successfully managing these relationships is crucial for Thailand's sustainable development and strengthening its leadership as an influential middle power regionally and internationally.

Keywords: Thailand-China relations, Community of shared future, Belt and road initiative, Middle power diplomacy, Regional cooperation, Sustainable regional development, ASEAN

Introduction

In the 21st century, the global political and economic landscape has undergone rapid changes, particularly with the rise of the People's Republic of China as a major power significantly influencing the dynamics of the Asian region and the international arena. Scholarly literature has examined this transformation from multiple perspectives, including power transition theory (Tammen et al. , 2000) , constructivist analyses of China's normative agenda

(Meng, 2023) , and regional studies focusing on Southeast Asia's strategic responses to China's rise (Goh, 2007) . Within this broader context, Thailand-China relations have attracted increasing scholarly attention as a case that illustrates the complex interplay between great power initiatives and middle power adaptation.

However, existing scholarship has tended to address Thailand- China relations either through a

primarily economic lens—focusing on trade volumes, investment flows, and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)—or through historical and cultural analyses of bilateral ties (Hewison, 2018; Han & Khemanitthathai, 2022). What remains underexplored is Thailand’s active strategic agency in shaping, legitimizing, and operationalizing China’s Community of Shared Future for Mankind (CSFM) concept at the bilateral level, and what this reveals about Thailand’s emerging role as a middle power in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, the intersection of this strategic partnership with Thailand’s sustainable regional development aspirations has not been systematically examined.

This article addresses these gaps by analyzing Thailand’s multidimensional strategic role in advancing the Thailand-China CSFM, with a focus on sustainable regional development. Specifically, it examines: (1) the conceptual and analytical foundations of the CSFM and its application to the Thailand-China bilateral context; (2) the historical evolution of Thailand-China relations leading to the formal CSFM declaration; (3) Thailand’s concrete strategic roles across economic, security, and socio-cultural dimensions; and (4) the opportunities and challenges Thailand faces in this strategic engagement. By doing so, the article contributes to the literature on middle power diplomacy, China’s foreign policy strategy, and ASEAN-China relations, while offering practical policy recommendations for Thailand’s sustainable development trajectory.

Concepts and analytical framework of Thailand-China relations

The concept of a Community of Shared Future for Mankind (CSFM)

The concept of a “Community of Shared Future for Mankind” (CSFM) is a core foreign policy strategy of China under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, reflecting China’s philosophy and direction in building a new global order that emphasizes cooperation and common interests (Xi, 2017). This concept was first mentioned by President Xi Jinping in March 2013 at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations and has been continuously developed to become the core of “Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy” (Raditio, 2024). Analytically, this article employs the CSFM concept not merely as background context but as a structuring framework to assess how Thailand selectively endorses,

adapts, and leverages individual CSFM pillars—BRI, GDI, GSI, and GCI—to advance its own national development priorities. This approach draws on middle power diplomacy literature, which highlights how secondary states use multilateral frameworks strategically to enhance their influence and autonomy (Cooper, Higgott, & Nossal, 1993).

Initially, the official translation of this concept was “Community of Shared Destiny for Mankind”, but it was later changed to “Community of Shared Future for Mankind” in September 2015 during President Xi Jinping’s speech to the United Nations General Assembly. This change was significant to mitigate the perception that China intended to dictate or determine the world’s destiny, instead emphasizing the creation of a more open and friendly shared future. However, in the original Chinese (人类命运共同体 - *renlei mingyun gongtongti*), the word “命运” (*mingyun*) still carries a deeper meaning than just “future”, implying “mandate” or “destiny”, reflecting China’s belief in playing a leading role in shaping the world’s direction (Ouyang, 2021).

The core principles of the CSFM concept include promoting peace, security, prosperity, and equality at the global level, emphasizing the necessity for all countries to cooperate in addressing common challenges such as climate change, terrorism, and pandemics. China views this concept as a solution for a world facing uncertainty and complex challenges, proposing an approach that emphasizes consultation, consensus-building, and the pursuit of common interests based on civilizational diversity (Meng, 2023). The CSFM concept is driven as China’s foreign policy strategy through several important global initiatives: The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which focuses on infrastructure and trade connectivity; the Global Development Initiative (GDI), which emphasizes inclusive and sustainable development; the Global Security Initiative (GSI), which promotes common security; and the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI), which emphasizes cultural exchange and mutual learning (Raditio, 2024).

Thailand-China relations as a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership

The relationship between Thailand and the People's Republic of China has a long and complex history, rooted in centuries of historical, cultural, and trade ties (Han & Khemanitthathai, 2022). Despite fluctuations during the Cold War, after 1975, when official diplomatic relations were established, the relationship between the two countries entered a new era of cooperation. In 2012, Thailand-China relations were elevated to a Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership (Hewison, 2018), reflecting the depth and breadth of cooperation covering political, economic, social, and security dimensions. This elevation of status is a result of a shared understanding of strategic interests, China's economic growth, and Thailand's need to diversify risks and seek new opportunities in the region. This strong relationship paved the way for a joint declaration to build a "Thailand-China Community with a Shared Future", a significant step in integrating bilateral relations with China's global vision (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, 2025).

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative documentary analysis methodology to examine Thailand's strategic role in advancing the Thailand-China Community with a Shared Future. The primary data sources comprise official bilateral documents, including joint statements, memoranda of understanding, and policy frameworks produced by the governments of Thailand and China, with particular focus on materials published between 2012 and 2025—a period spanning the elevation of bilateral relations to a Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership through to the most recent CSFM reaffirmation. Key documents analyzed include the 2025 Joint Statement between Thailand and China on Advancing the Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, 2025), policy documents related to BRI cooperation in Thailand, and official records from ASEAN multilateral forums.

Document selection was guided by three criteria: (1) direct relevance to the Thailand-China bilateral relationship within the CSFM framework; (2) official or semi-official status ensuring policy representativeness; and (3) temporal coverage of the 2012-2025 period to

capture the strategic evolution of bilateral relations. Secondary sources include peer-reviewed academic literature on Thailand-China relations, middle power diplomacy theory, and China's foreign policy strategy, which provide the analytical lens for interpreting primary source content. The analytical approach involves systematic thematic coding of documents around the key dimensions of cooperation—economic, security, and socio-cultural—followed by interpretive analysis linking empirical findings to the theoretical frameworks of middle power diplomacy and sustainable regional development. This approach acknowledges the inherent limitation that official documents may reflect aspirational rather than operational realities, a constraint mitigated by cross-referencing with critical academic literature.

Dynamics of Thailand-China relations: From the past to a community of shared future

The relationship between Thailand and the People's Republic of China is a story woven with a long history, deeply rooted in centuries of continuous migration, trade, and cultural exchange. Understanding the development of relations between the two countries is crucial for analyzing Thailand's role in China's Community of Shared Future strategy.

Historical and cultural foundations

The relationship between the territory that is now Thailand and China dates back to ancient times, with evidence of trade contacts and cultural exchange going back to the 15th century during the Ming Dynasty (Wade, 2018). Zheng He's maritime expeditions visited the Ayutthaya Kingdom. Thailand, or Siam at that time, was recognized as one of the loyal tributary states with strong ties to China. This relationship continued until the Qing Dynasty, especially in the 1760s, when the Qing Dynasty's intervention in Burma helped reduce Burmese pressure on Thailand, and the import of Thai rice helped feed the Chinese population (Viraphol, 1979). Furthermore, according to estimates by the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission and census data, approximately 9–14 percent of Thailand's population is of Chinese descent, constituting one of the largest overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia (Wongsurawat, 2020; Han & Khemanitthathai, 2022). These overseas Chinese communities have played a

significant role in driving the Thai economy and society throughout history. The phrase “Thailand and China are one family” (中泰一家 - zhong tai yijia qin) reflects the deep-rooted cultural ties between the two nations (Hewison, 2018).

Establishment of diplomatic relations and key developments

Formal relations between Thailand and the People’s Republic of China officially began in July 1975, after years of negotiations. Prior to that, Thailand had diplomatic relations with the Republic of China (Taiwan) and was wary of communist China during the Cold War when Thailand was a close ally of the United States (Hewison, 2020). Changes in the international political landscape, particularly the US withdrawal from Vietnam, led Thailand to establish relations with mainland China. In 1978, China supported Thailand during the Cambodian conflict, where Vietnam overthrew the Khmer Rouge (Raymond, 2020). Thailand continued to adhere to the One China Policy and maintained unofficial relations with Taiwan. Many Thai-Chinese businesses, especially the Charoen Pokphand Group (CP Group), became among the largest foreign investors in China, part of the Bamboo Network that connects overseas Chinese businesses across the region (Ampalavanar-Brown, 1998). Thailand-China relations were further elevated in 2012 to a Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership.

Joint declaration to build a community of shared future

A significant turning point linking Thailand’s relations with China’s global vision is the joint declaration to build a “Thailand-China Community with a Shared Future.” This concept was officially re-emphasized during President Xi Jinping’s visit to Thailand in 2022, where a joint statement was signed outlining the commitment to building this community to enhance stability, prosperity, and sustainability (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, 2025). Similarly, the visit of Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra to the People’s Republic of China in February 2025 reaffirmed this commitment, with both sides emphasizing the celebration of the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations in 2025 under the

theme “Golden 50 Years of China-Thailand Friendship” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, 2025).

Thailand’s strategic role in driving the community of shared future

Thailand, as a country with a significant role in Southeast Asia, has demonstrated a strategic role in driving China’s Community of Shared Future vision through cooperation in various dimensions. From a middle power diplomacy perspective, Thailand’s engagement with the CSFM reflects a calculated strategy of niche diplomacy and multilateral engagement, seeking to leverage China’s economic and normative initiatives to amplify Thailand’s regional influence while maintaining strategic hedging with other major powers (Cooper et al., 1993; Goh, 2007).

Linking development strategies

One of Thailand’s key roles is to integrate its development strategies with China’s global initiatives, especially the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Thailand has participated in and supported the BRI, with a key project being the Thailand-China high-speed rail project, which is part of the transportation network connecting southern China through Laos to Thailand. This project will not only upgrade Thailand’s transportation infrastructure but also play a crucial role in creating a “Thailand-Laos-China Economic Corridor” that will promote trade, investment, and tourism in the region (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, 2025). In addition to the BRI, Thailand also supports the Global Development Initiative (GDI), the Global Security Initiative (GSI), and the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI) (Meng, 2023). This strategic alignment reflects Thailand’s recognition that selective endorsement of China’s global frameworks can generate tangible developmental benefits while positioning Thailand as a responsible regional stakeholder committed to multilateral cooperation norms.

Economic and trade cooperation

China has been Thailand’s top trading partner consistently, and the value of bilateral trade has grown significantly over recent years. According to data from the Ministry of Commerce of Thailand, bilateral trade

between Thailand and China reached approximately USD 105 billion in 2023, with China accounting for roughly 20 percent of Thailand’s total trade value (Ministry of Commerce of Thailand, 2024). Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) in Thailand has also expanded substantially, particularly in the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC), where China emerged as one of the leading sources of investment with commitments exceeding USD 8 billion between 2018 and 2023 (Thailand Board of Investment, 2024). Thailand and China have agreed to promote bilateral trade by increasing market access, promoting high- quality products, and expanding e-commerce cooperation. Thailand has welcomed long-term investment from China, especially in high-value-added and

environmentally friendly industries such as electric vehicles (EVs) , artificial intelligence (AI) , biotechnology, and clean energy. These sectors align with Thailand’s national development strategy, particularly the Thailand 4.0 policy and the S-curve industries framework, suggesting a deliberate strategy of leveraging Chinese capital and technology to accelerate Thailand’s economic transformation (National Economic and Social Development Council, 2023). Both countries are also accelerating negotiations on an action plan under the Five- Year Development Plan for Trade and Economic Cooperation (2025-2029) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, 2025).

Table 1 Key milestones in Thailand-China relations (15th Century–2025)

Year	Key development in Thailand-China relations
15th century	Trade contacts and cultural exchange during the Ming Dynasty; Zheng He’s maritime expeditions visit Ayutthaya Kingdom
1760s	Qing Dynasty assistance reduces Burmese pressure on Thailand; Thai rice trade supports Chinese population
1975	Establishment of formal diplomatic relations between Thailand and the People’s Republic of China
1978	China supports Thailand during the Cambodian conflict; bilateral relations shift toward trade and economy
2012	Thailand-China relations elevated to Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership
2022	President Xi Jinping visits Thailand; joint statement on building a Thailand-China Community with a Shared Future signed
2024	Mutual visa exemption between Thailand and China takes effect, facilitating people-to-people exchanges
2025	PM Paetongtarn Shinawatra visits Beijing; joint statement reaffirms CSFM commitment; celebration of 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations under “Golden 50 Years” theme

Source: Compiled by the author based on Hewison (2018); Raymond (2020); Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand (2025)

Security cooperation

Security cooperation is another important dimension in Thailand-China relations, covering counter- terrorism, transnational crime, cybersecurity, and defense exchanges and joint military exercises. These cooperations contribute to maintaining regional

stability and reflect the increasing trust between the armed forces of both countries. Thailand supports China’s role in resolving regional and global security issues, especially within cooperation frameworks such as the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting- Plus (ADMM- Plus) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the

Kingdom of Thailand, 2025). From a middle power diplomacy perspective, Thailand's security engagement with China through multilateral frameworks such as ADMM- Plus enables it to benefit from cooperative security arrangements while avoiding the perception of exclusive alignment with Beijing, thereby preserving its strategic hedging posture.

Social and cultural cooperation

Social and cultural ties are fundamental to Thailand- China relations. Both countries prioritize promoting people-to-people exchanges through various programs such as tourism, education, arts, and culture (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, 2025). The mutual visa exemption, which came into effect in 2024, has facilitated travel and exchange between people. Furthermore, the role of the Thai Royal Family, especially Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, who is interested in Chinese language and culture and is hailed as a "royal symbol" of modern Thailand-China relations, has significantly contributed to strengthening people- to-people ties (Wongsurawat, 2020).

Thailand's role in regional and multilateral forums

Thailand plays a crucial role in promoting cooperation between China and ASEAN and other

multilateral cooperation frameworks. Thailand adheres to the One China Policy and supports China's constructive role in regional and global affairs, especially as a key supporter of cooperation mechanisms within ASEAN, such as ASEAN+3 and the East Asia Summit (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, 2025). Thailand's position as a bridge between China and Southeast Asia—underpinned by its long-standing tradition of flexible and balanced diplomacy—gives it a distinctive strategic role in promoting mutual understanding and cooperation that is essential for building a Community of Shared Future at the regional level. This bridge- building function represents a form of middle power contribution that enhances Thailand's international standing beyond what its material capabilities alone would suggest.

Challenges and opportunities in building sustainable cooperation

The following analysis examines the key opportunities and challenges Thailand faces in advancing the CSFM, interpreted through the lens of sustainable regional development and middle power diplomacy. As Table 2 illustrates, these dimensions are interconnected: opportunities are often structurally linked to corresponding challenges, requiring Thailand to pursue a dual strategy of engagement and risk management.

Table 2 Summary of opportunities and challenges for Thailand in advancing the CSFM

Opportunities	Challenges
Economic growth and regional connectivity through BRI infrastructure	Concerns over Chinese economic influence and debt dependency
Technological transfer in EVs, AI, and biotechnology sectors	Balancing strategic relations among major powers (US, Japan, China)
Regional stability through multilateral security frameworks (ADMM-Plus)	Political and social system differences hindering deeper integration
Soft power and cultural exchange enhancing people-to-people ties	Environmental and social impacts from large-scale infrastructure projects
Sustainable development collaboration (GDI, climate change, public health)	Transparency deficits in BRI project procurement and governance

Source: Compiled by the author

Challenges

1. Concerns about China's influence from investment and debt: China's increasing economic influence through large-scale infrastructure projects, particularly under the BRI, has raised concerns in some quarters about potential debt traps and over-reliance on China. Scholars such as Brautigam (2020) have cautioned that while the "debt trap" narrative is often overstated, host countries must still carefully manage debt sustainability and project viability. For Thailand, the key risk lies not in debt restructuring per se but in the structural dependency that could arise from an asymmetric economic relationship with a single dominant partner. Thailand needs to carefully manage its debt burden and ensure that projects are economically viable and serve its long-term development goals. Transparency in project agreements and procurement processes is crucial to mitigate these concerns.

2. Balancing relations with major powers: Thailand maintains a foreign policy of balancing relations with major powers, including the United States, Japan, and China. As China's influence grows, Thailand faces the challenge of navigating complex geopolitical dynamics to avoid being perceived as aligning too closely with any single power. This challenge is particularly acute in the context of US-China strategic competition, where Thailand's participation in CSFM initiatives risks being interpreted by Washington as a signal of strategic realignment (Goh, 2007). Thailand's historical tradition of "bending with the wind"—adapting diplomatically to shifting power dynamics—remains its most important tool for navigating this challenge. Maintaining strategic autonomy and diversified partnerships is essential for Thailand's long-term security and prosperity.

3. Cultural and social integration: Despite historical ties, differences in political systems, values, and social norms can pose challenges to deeper cultural and social integration. While people-to-people exchanges are encouraged, ensuring mutual understanding and respect for diverse perspectives is crucial to prevent misunderstandings and foster genuine friendship.

4. Environmental and social impacts of development projects: Large-scale development projects, such as the high-speed rail, can have significant

environmental and social impacts. Thailand needs to ensure that these projects adhere to strict environmental and social safeguards, involve local communities in decision-making processes, and prioritize sustainable development practices. The alignment of BRI projects with Thailand's national environmental standards and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represents a critical benchmark for assessing whether CSFM cooperation genuinely advances sustainable regional development or primarily serves economic growth objectives.

Opportunities

1. Economic growth and connectivity: China's economic dynamism and its various initiatives, particularly the BRI, offer significant opportunities for Thailand to enhance its economic growth and regional connectivity. Improved infrastructure, increased trade, and greater investment flows can boost Thailand's economy, create jobs, and integrate it more deeply into regional and global supply chains.

2. Technological transfer and innovation: Cooperation with China in high-tech industries such as EVs, AI, and biotechnology can facilitate technological transfer and foster innovation in Thailand. The strategic concentration of Chinese investment in Thailand's Eastern Economic Corridor—a designated high-technology zone—creates particular opportunities for knowledge spillovers and the development of domestic technological capabilities, provided that joint venture and technology transfer requirements are effectively enforced. This can help Thailand move up the value chain and enhance its competitiveness in emerging sectors.

3. Regional stability and security: China's commitment to regional stability and its active role in multilateral security frameworks can contribute to a more secure and peaceful Southeast Asia. Thailand can leverage its strategic partnership with China to address common security challenges, such as transnational crime, terrorism, and cybersecurity threats.

4. Enhanced soft power and cultural exchange: The long-standing cultural ties and increasing people-to-people exchanges can enhance Thailand's soft power and promote mutual understanding. Cultural diplomacy, educational

cooperation, and tourism can strengthen the bonds between the two nations and foster a deeper appreciation of each other's cultures.

5. Sustainable development and global governance: China's emphasis on sustainable development through initiatives like the GDI and its growing role in global governance provide opportunities for Thailand to collaborate on addressing global challenges such as climate change, poverty reduction, and public health. This cooperation can enhance Thailand's international standing and contribute to a more equitable and sustainable global order.

Discussion

The preceding analysis reveals that Thailand's engagement with the CSFM is best understood not as passive accommodation of Chinese influence but as an active exercise of middle power diplomacy. Thailand selectively endorses and operationalizes CSFM pillars that align with its national development priorities—most notably BRI infrastructure and GDI sustainable development—while maintaining strategic hedging through its alliances with the United States and Japan and its centrality within ASEAN. This approach reflects what Cooper et al. (1993) describe as “niche diplomacy”: the identification of specific issue areas where a middle power can make a distinctive contribution while leveraging multilateral frameworks to punch above its strategic weight.

The tensions between opportunity and challenge identified in this analysis are not incidental but structural. The same BRI investment flows that offer Thailand economic growth opportunities simultaneously create vulnerabilities to Chinese economic dependency. The same security cooperation arrangements that contribute to regional stability also risk entangling Thailand in US-China strategic competition. Managing these structural tensions is the central challenge of Thai foreign policy in the CSFM era. The evidence suggests that Thailand's most effective strategy lies in institutionalizing transparency mechanisms in bilateral cooperation, deepening its ASEAN leadership role as a buffer against over-reliance on any single partner, and proactively shaping the normative content of CSFM cooperation to align with internationally recognized sustainable development standards.

From a sustainable regional development perspective, the CSFM framework presents both a vehicle and a challenge. As a vehicle, it channels substantial Chinese resources toward infrastructure, technology, and connectivity that Thailand needs to achieve its Thailand 4.0 development ambitions. As a challenge, the framework's primary architects are in Beijing, raising legitimate questions about whose vision of “sustainability” and “shared future” ultimately prevails in project design and implementation. Thailand's leverage lies in its ASEAN membership, its historical tradition of diplomatic balancing, and the demonstrated economic desirability of the Thai market to Chinese investors—factors that collectively give Bangkok more negotiating power than its middle power status might suggest.

Conclusion

Thailand's strategic role in China's Community of Shared Future vision is multifaceted and dynamic, reflecting a pragmatic approach to foreign policy that seeks to maximize national interests amidst a changing global landscape. The historical and cultural ties between Thailand and China provide a strong foundation for cooperation, which has been further solidified by the establishment of a Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership and the joint declaration to build a Thailand-China Community with a Shared Future. This article has argued that Thailand's engagement with the CSFM is best understood as an active exercise of middle power diplomacy, characterized by selective multilateral engagement, strategic hedging, and niche diplomacy rather than passive accommodation of Chinese preferences.

Thailand's active participation in China's global initiatives, particularly the Belt and Road Initiative, Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative, and Global Civilization Initiative, demonstrates its commitment to leveraging China's economic and political influence for its own development and regional stability. However, this strategic engagement is not without its challenges. Thailand must carefully navigate concerns regarding China's growing influence, manage its relations with other major powers, and ensure that development projects are sustainable and inclusive.

The policy recommendations emerging from this analysis are fivefold. First, Thailand should institutionalize transparency standards in all BRI and CSFM-related project procurement to build public trust and mitigate dependency risks. Second, Thailand should proactively leverage its ASEAN leadership role to shape the normative content of CSFM cooperation, ensuring alignment with international sustainable development standards and the SDGs. Third, Thailand should diversify its strategic partnerships to maintain genuine autonomy, preventing any single bilateral relationship from becoming structurally determinative of its foreign policy choices. Fourth, Thailand should negotiate technology transfer and joint venture requirements as binding conditions for large-scale Chinese investment, ensuring that economic cooperation generates durable domestic capabilities. Fifth, Thailand should invest in developing its own analytical and diplomatic capacity to engage with CSFM frameworks on an informed, evidence-based basis rather than primarily on the basis of official joint statements. Successfully managing these relationships is crucial for Thailand's sustainable development and strengthening its leadership as an influential middle power regionally and internationally.

Declaration of Generative AI in Scientific Writing

The author would like to declare that generative AI (DeepL Translator and Grammarly) was used solely for assistance in checking and refining the English language in this manuscript, including minor translations. The author entirely generated the content, ideas, and findings presented in the manuscript without AI assistance. After language editing, the author reviewed and validated the final version to ensure its accuracy and integrity.

CRediT Author Statement

Amorn Wangukkarangkul: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Resources, Writing – Original Draft Preparation, Writing – Review & Editing, Visualization, Project Administration, Funding Acquisition.

Acknowledgment

This research project is funded by the National Research Council of Thailand (NRCT).

References

- Ampalavanar-Brown, R. (1998). Overseas Chinese investments in China – patterns of growth, diversification and finance: The case of Charoen Pokphand. *The China Quarterly*, 155, 610-636.
- Brautigam, D. (2020). A critical look at Chinese 'debt-trap diplomacy': The rise of a meme. *Area Development and Policy*, 5(1), 1-14.
- Cooper, A. F., Higgott, R. A., & Nossal, K. R. (1993). *Relocating middle powers: Australia and Canada in a changing world order*. Vancouver, Canada: University of British Columbia Press.
- Goh, E. (2007). Great powers and hierarchical order in Southeast Asia: Analyzing regional security strategies. *International Security*, 32(3), 113-157.
- Han, E., & Khemanitthathai, S. (2022). Through the prism of migration: History of migration and contemporary Chinese engagement with Thailand. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 32, 620-634.
- Hewison, K. (2018). Thailand: an old relationship renewed. *The Pacific Review*, 31(1), 116-130.
- Hewison, K. (2020). Black site: The Cold War and the shaping of Thailand's politics. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 50, 551-570.
- Meng, C. (2023). Jointly building a China-Thailand community with a shared future will inject new impetus into the development of the two countries and the region. *International Journal of Education and Humanities*, 11(3), 240-243.
- Ministry of Commerce of Thailand. (2024). *Thailand-China trade statistics 2023*. Bangkok, Thailand: Ministry of Commerce.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand. (2025). *Joint statement between the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand and the Government of the People's Republic of China on advancing the comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership and building a Thailand-China community with a shared future*. Retrieved from <https://www.mfa.go.th/en/content/joint-statement-th-ch-2025-en?cate=5d5bcb4e15e39c306000683c>
- National Economic and Social Development Council. (2023). *Thailand's national development strategy 2018–2037*. Bangkok, Thailand: Office of the

National Economic and Social Development Council.

- Ouyang, X. (2021). 'Tianxia' and 'Renlei mingyun gongtongti': a revival of cosmopolitanism in a Chinese cultural disguise? *Journal of Global Ethics*, 17, 1-10.
- Raditio, K. H. (2024, September 9). Deciphering Xi Jinping's community of shared future for mankind. *E-International Relations*. Retrieved from <https://www.e-ir.info/2024/09/09/deciphering-xi-jinpings-community-of-shared-future-for-mankind/>
- Raymond, G. (2020). Strategic culture and Thailand's response to Vietnam's occupation of Cambodia, 1979–1989: A Cold War epilogue. *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 22, 4-45.
- Tammen, R. L., Kugler, J., Lemke, D., Stam, A. C., Abdollahian, M., Alsharabati, C., Efird, B., & Organski, A. F. K. (2000). *Power Transitions: Strategies for the 21st Century*. New York, NY: Chatham House.
- Thailand Board of Investment. (2024). *Investment Statistics: Chinese FDI in Thailand 2018-2023*. Bangkok, Thailand: BOI.
- Viraphol, S. (1979). Tribute and profit: Sino-Siamese trade, 1652–1853. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 39, 131-133.
- Wade, G. (2018). *Ming China and Southeast Asia in the fifteenth century* (pp. 87-129). In Wade, G., & Chin, J.K. (Eds.). *China and Southeast Asia*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Wongsurawat, W. (2020). *Disturbing the inequality of PRC influence on the position of ethnic Chinese in Thailand in the new era* (pp. 146-161). In Lee, L.T. (Ed.). *Chinese People's Diplomacy and Developmental Relations with East Asia: Trends in the Xi Jinping Era*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Xi, J. P. (2017). *The governance of China* (2nd eds.). Beijing, China: Foreign Languages Press.
- Yao, Y. (2022). *Opportunities, challenges and countermeasures for Chinese enterprises investing in Thailand in post-epidemic era* (pp. 1169-1174). In Proceedings of the 2022 2nd International Conference on Enterprise Management and Economic Development (ICEMED 2022). Dalian, China: Academic Exchange Information Centre.