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Manuscripts for consideration and editorial communication should be sent to:

The Editor, *International Journal of China Studies*

Institute of China Studies, University of Malaya

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Tel: +(603) 7967 7288

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Australia in the Region: Dialogue, Transparency and Trust

Australian High Commissioner to Malaysia, H.E. Danielle *Heinicke*

A decade or two ago, readers may have wondered why the Australian High Commissioner to Malaysia would write an introduction to an edition of the *International Journal of China Studies*. But our region has changed rapidly since then and Australia's place in and vision for the region has changed along with it.

Today, Australia recognises that having a deep understanding of our region matters. And more than ever, it matters how we work with regional partners, including China, to shape a peaceful, prosperous and secure region.

Australia, ASEAN and the Indo-Pacific region

Australia has longstanding connections across the Indo-Pacific – through geography, trade, and people – and a shared vision for a peaceful, stable, and prosperous region. In March this year, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese publicly affirmed “Australia is committed to being an exemplary partner... – we will continue to be constructive, and to engage with respect, honesty and trust, and, importantly, to listen.”

Working with Southeast Asia, we can – and we want to – play a bigger role in the region's pursuit of economic opportunity, development, and growth. We have launched *Invested: Australia's Southeast Asia Economic Strategy to 2040* – which outlines a practical pathway to boost two-way trade between Australia and Southeast Asia – to maximise the potential of our economic ties. We are supporting inclusive and sustainable growth across Southeast Asia, while maintaining quality support and a longstanding commitment to local employment and shared prosperity.

ASEAN is central to our shared vision for the region. As ASEAN's first dialogue partner, and a Comprehensive Strategic Partner, Australia is committed to working together to pursue a region where differences and disputes are settled through institutions, and mutually agreed rules and norms. Australia sees ASEAN and its architecture as indispensable for

dialogue—to enable cooperation, build strategic trust and guard against conflict. We are a transparent partner, and we respect ASEAN principles and its shared goals.

In the face of new and growing challenges, it is vital that across the region we all find common ground, build resilience and encourage open communication. And that is where platforms such as this journal help us to understand the region better, and to identify shared solutions to emerging challenges in the economic, political, cultural, and scientific realms.

Australia's Relationship with China

As Australia has learnt from, and changed with, our broader region, so too has our relationship with China changed. A stable and constructive Australia-China relationship is in the interest of both countries. Our current relationship is based on strong economic and trade complementarities and longstanding community and cultural links. We are Comprehensive Strategic Partners, reflecting the breadth and depth of our relationship.

Economic ties are a keystone of the Australia-China relationship. China is Australia's largest two-way trading partner and will remain so for the foreseeable future. Total two-way goods and services trade between Australia and China reached a record AUD\$327 billion in 2023. In 2022-23, our trade with China accounted for 26 per cent of our goods and services trade with the world.

In recent years, Australia and China have taken significant steps to stabilise our relationship for the benefit of both countries and the broader region. Australia's approach will remain patient, calibrated and deliberate. Australia cooperates with China where we can, disagrees where we must, and engages in our national interest.

We know that others in our region are looking at how we manage our relationship with China, as we in turn look to and learn from our regional partners' relationships. While Australia and China have many shared interests, we also have differences to manage. In our engagement with China, we work in support of the welfare of our citizens, the rights and freedoms of those who live in Australia, and our strategic, security and trade interests. Yet our relationship with China should not be defined by our differences – we recognise they are there, yet also recognise the mutual benefits that flow from our engagement. We will manage differences wisely.

Australia's Chinese Diaspora

Established in 2010, this journal has published many articles on the role of Chinese diaspora in Malaysia, Southeast Asia and further abroad. To contribute to this discussion, I would like to elaborate on the role of this important community in Australia.

Australia today is a modern and multicultural nation. We are home to people of more than 300 ancestries and the oldest continuing culture on earth. We are a nation where half our population was born overseas or has a parent who was born overseas. When Australians look out to the region, we see ourselves reflected in it and equally, the region can see itself reflected in Australia.

Australian Chinese communities have contributed immensely to our society. They form the largest migrant group in Australia, with more than 1.4 million people of Chinese heritage living in Australia today. Their experiences are as diverse as their views. Many were born in Australia, with lineages that span generations of Australian history. Others have migrated more recently from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia, including Malaysia.

We are proud of the many contributions Australians of Chinese heritage have made to our nation – from Dr Victor Chang AC, who was a pioneer of modern heart transplant surgery, to Professor Wang Gungwu AO CBE, an eminent historian previously based in Malaysia specialising in China and Southeast Asia. We have award-winning media personalities and celebrity chefs, such as Malaysian-Chinese-Australian, Poh Ling Yeow, and business leaders such as Malaysian-Chinese Ming Long AM, who is Chair of Diversity Council Australia and the first Asian-Australian woman to lead an ASX200 company. These leaders have shown what it means to draw on a rich cultural heritage, and create something even stronger for Australia and our region.

Looking to the Future: Trust and Transparency in Our Regional Partnerships

It is an important time to reflect on our key relationships within the region, including those with ASEAN and China. In 2024 Australia is celebrating 50 years of cooperation with ASEAN. To commemorate this milestone, we hosted the ASEAN-Australia Special Summit in Melbourne in March

hosting leaders of all ASEAN countries and Timor-Leste. The Summit was a concrete demonstration that Australia is invested in and committed to the region. It demonstrated how we listen to and understand partners' perspectives on our shared challenges, and how we exchange ideas and expertise to meet these challenges together. In the spirit of the Summit, Australia will continue to strengthen not only our political, security and economic connections with ASEAN and the Indo-Pacific region, but also the deep ties between our people.

We look forward to working with Malaysia, as ASEAN Chair in 2025, to take our relationship to new heights. 2025 will be a particularly special year for Australia and Malaysia, as we will also commemorate 70 years of Australia's diplomatic presence in Malaysia.

Australia has always been committed to building relationships based on trust. We do this through our open and practical relationships with other countries, including China, ASEAN Members States such as Malaysia, and with regional and global institutions such as ASEAN and the United Nations. While these relationships are upheld and developed through official channels, they are also supported in other ways – such as setting out Australia's views and vision for the region in a journal article such as this.

As we look to the future, Australia will continue to engage with transparency and trust. And we will continue to engage in dialogue, and to encourage others in the region to do likewise. Because it is only through dialogue, transparency and trust that we can all contribute to making our region more peaceful, stable and prosperous.

Research Articles

Exporting Autocracy via BRI? Experiences from Southeast Asia

Yung-Ming Yen*

Tunghai University

Abstract

While most agree that China's Belt and Road Initiative is an ambitious strategy to maximise its geopolitical position worldwide, policymakers and scholars have questioned whether the BRI implies an attempt to promote Beijing's governance model. This article takes a political economy approach to analyse the domestic political dynamics of the recipient countries. Political elites tend to employ available incentives to consolidate their winning coalitions if their political survival is threatened. A regime under transition is vulnerable to external influence during political competition, and the "convenient" money from Beijing becomes an offer that the ruling elites of recipient states cannot decline. Consequently, such external influence indirectly undermines the regime dynamics of recipient states. The case studies of four Southeast Asian states — Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand — offer supportive evidence for this explanation.

Keywords: *Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Southeast Asia, selectorate theory, autocracy export.*

* Professor, Department of Political Science, Tunghai University, Taiwan; Email: yyen76@gmail.com.

1. Introduction

The 2013 announcement of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by Chinese President Xi Jinping revealed the desire of the “Middle Empire” to restore the glory it lost over the last two centuries. By the end of 2018, the cumulative amount of investments undertaken within the framework of BRI was over \$650 billion. Although the initiative was popular in the developing world, its potential effects have raised concerns in policy and intellectual circles. Researchers are eager to determine BRI’s influence on economic, political, social, and strategic spheres. For example, does BRI bring recipient countries closer to Beijing’s stance on foreign policy matters? Some warn the possibility of a “debt trap” for recipient countries as they cannot change their dependence on China in the foreseeable future. Finally, could BRI change the political dynamics of the target state? (Hsueh, 2020)

In June 2020, the exiled opposition leader of Cambodia, Sam Rainsy, published an article in *Foreign Affairs* titled “China Has Designs on Democracy in Southeast Asia.” His main argument focuses on Beijing’s military expansion in Southeast Asia through BRI projects and the threat such an expansion poses to the U.S.’s strategic status in the region (Rainsy, 2020). However, Sam Rainsy’s analysis does not address the nexus between BRI and the democracy recession among regional states. The external factor of regime dynamics has been a critical issue for political scientists, and the last two decades have witnessed a change in research focus from democracy promotion to autocracy promotion. In contrast to the discussion of democracy promotion, how illiberal power influences the political development of target states has become the focal point in literature. As we approach the first decade of BRI, it is crucial to investigate the political consequences and assess the judgment that Beijing is exporting autocracy in BRI partner states.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. Section two discusses theoretical perspectives on autocracy promotion and export to evaluate their applicability in the Southeast Asian context. Section three briefly discusses BRI and its current status in Southeast Asia. In section four, case studies are conducted in four Southeast Asian states (Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand) to examine the linkage between BRI outputs and political dynamics. Finally, section five concludes the research findings and offers some theoretical reflection.

2. Theoretical Discussion

Reilly argues that the degree of democracy across Southeast Asian countries varies based on geographical and historical conditions (Reilly, 2013). Generally, a country's geographic proximity to China is negatively related to its level of democracy; thus, maritime states are more likely to enjoy democratic rule than their mainland counterparts. On the other hand, the legacy of China's tributary system shapes the culture and institutional preferences of periphery countries, fortifying their non-democratic inclination. However, the relative weakness of Reilly's explanation lies in his failure to specify the causal mechanism (Levitsky and Way, 2006).

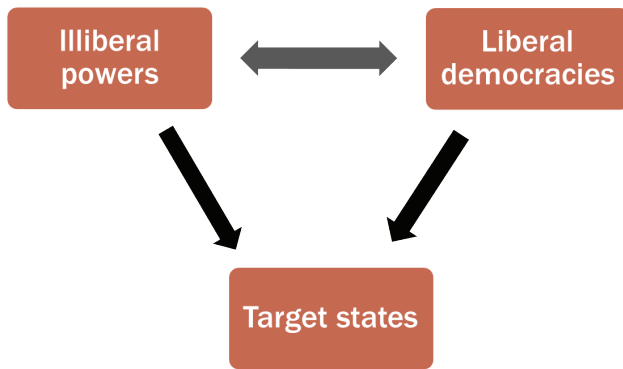
The influence of external factors has been a significant line of debate in the literature on democratisation. Unlike the previous two waves of democratic transitions, the "Third Wave" witnessed remarkable efforts by foreign states and international organisations to facilitate the change of governance patterns (Huntington, 1991). However, this argument does not hold up well in the Southeast Asian context. Had these external forces successfully wielded influence, the speed and scope of democratic transition in this region should have been more remarkable. Instead, international factors played a certain, but not decisive, role in political developments in the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia. For this reason, scholars of Southeast Asian politics tend to emphasise the relevance of the elite-level split in the transition process and other factors along with the development of democratic governance (Slater, 2008).

As the global trend of democratisation began to reverse in 2006, the shadow cast by authoritarian powers became increasingly salient. The 2008 global financial crisis was the tipping point where developing states questioned the institutional superiority of liberal democracy as a governance model. The fact that China survived the crisis and became the "saviour" of the global economy amplified the desirability of the "Beijing model". For developing countries, the original aspiration of freedom and development (as realised in the US and European societies) was overwhelmed by the "order and prosperity" illustrated by illiberal powers such as China.

The "democracy in retreat" trend suggests the need to scrutinise the framework of democratisation literature, one of which is the triangular framework introduced by Risse and Babayan consisting of Western democracy promoters, illiberal challengers, and the target states (Risse

and Babayan, 2015). Within this structure, two related but contradictory phenomena, namely democracy promotion and autocracy promotion, can be identified (see Figure 1). In contrast to its popularity in the 1990s, democracy promotion has gradually lost its magic in the last two decades, specifically when Washington shifted to unilateralism since the War on Terror. On the other hand, the increasing engagements between illiberal powers (especially Russia and China) and target countries exemplify autocracy promotion (Chen and Kinzelbach, 2015).¹

Figure 1. Democracy/Autocracy Export



Conceptually, the interaction between illiberal powers and target states can be classified as authoritarian diffusion or autocracy promotion. While the former emphasizes cross-border learning and conscious emulation by the target states, the latter focuses on the role of illiberal powers. Ambrosio argues that authoritarian diffusion essentially entails an interactive process involving multiple actors, with two mechanisms, namely the logic of appropriateness and the logic of effectiveness, operating to engender the normative traction that brings about regime change (Ambrosio, 2010:382). Inspired by the constructivist paradigm, this explanation offers a convincing account of the ideational shift toward the illiberal governance model.

Similar to the discussion on democracy promotion, the literature on autocracy promotion assumes the apparent desire of powerful states to advance their preferred regime design in target societies. Accordingly, an illiberal power would adopt a policy to promote its regime type abroad. Nevertheless, the motive deserves closer examination as “promotion” suggests ideological commitment. For liberal powers, it is understandable

that their sincere belief in democratic values could drive a policy to promote democratic governance abroad. In the case of illiberal powers, however, the genuine belief in the desirability of authoritarian rule is a matter that requires scrutiny. Authoritarian leaders justify their takeover with exigency measures and commit to resuming democracy once the situation returns to normalcy. Thus, viewing illiberal powers as having a strong interest in their regime type, similar to democratic countries, could be problematic. Indeed, it has been argued that authoritarian powers may have the capabilities but lack the willingness to promote their regime type (Nathan, 2015). While insecurity could lead authoritarian powers to adopt countervailing measures against democracy promotion, establishing the “Beijing model” or “Moscow model” abroad may not necessarily ensue. Such a view is echoed by Tansey (2016), who questions the underlying motives of illiberal powers from three aspects: do external actors intend to shape domestic politics? Is the intention associated with a specific regime type or incumbent politicians? What is the nature of illiberal powers’ motivations? Tansey contends that what has been widely discussed as autocracy promotion in the literature is somewhat exaggerated. While qualified examples existed in the 19th and early 20th centuries, such a practice is no longer evident in the post-Cold War era (Tansey, 2016:153-5).

Thus, to study the external factors of authoritarian transition, it may not be sufficient to focus solely on the normative motivation of either the illiberal powers or the recipient states (Yakouchyk, 2019). Moreover, the framework shown in Figure 1 indicates the possibility that the efforts of autocracy promotion and democracy promotion could cancel each other out in the target country. The whole picture of democracy/autocracy promotion nowadays includes policy outputs from great powers and the nuances within the target country. Therefore, scholars began to posit the relevance of combining foreign policy analysis with the micro-foundation of domestic politics (Bader et al., 2010). Risse and Babayan argue that the causal mechanism between external forces and local consequences hinges on “the (dis-)empowerment of liberal as well as illiberal forces in the target countries” (Risse and Babayan, 2015:389). Thus, the domestic balance of power influences the probability of democracy promotion. Likewise, the impact of “autocracy export” is conditioned by the interplay of domestic interests in the target states, specifically, the calculation of political interest by the ruling elites.

Bueno de Mesquita and his colleagues shed further light on this from a political economy perspective (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003). Remaining in power (political survival) is the ultimate objective of all incumbent elites, but the way to realize this objective varies according to the regime's institutional configuration. In liberal democracies, political leaders depend on a large coalition of supporters to win a majority in the election, but dictators in autocracies usually "rely on a small coalition of cronies; then coalition members are readily satisfied by being made rich through corruption and cronyism" (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2012:121).

It is rational for authoritarian leaders to reward their coalition members at the expense of the public interest, given the small coalition size. Consequently, such leaders usually adopt "bad" policies, measures that undermine the public interest but benefit ruling elites and their cronies (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003). Inspired by this framework, Bader investigates the nexus between the distributional coalition and autocratic cooperation (Bader, 2015a). She finds it mutually beneficial for autocracies to cooperate since both sides could consolidate their winning coalitions domestically through such collaboration: "Interaction at the international level creates benefits which those involved can pass on to their domestic winning coalition" (Bader, 2015b). Elites in target states benefit from illiberal powers to buy off members of the winning coalition. In return, the resources of the target states are at such powers' disposal. Given Bader's focus on the rationale of complying with Beijing's economic activism, she does not pay too much attention to the political consequence of such interaction. Bader argues that closer links between China and authoritarian states could assist the political survival of the latter, but the empirical evidence is neither systematic nor conclusive (Bader, 2015a: 30-31)

Based on the logic of the selectorate theory, ruling elites have to decide on a balance between revenue and spending. The character of public goods is that it usually takes time for them to generate political support for the ruling administration. Instead, resources offered by illiberal powers would quickly satisfy the need of incumbent elites to reward members of the winning coalition, no matter what kinds of goods are required. Thus, the ruling elites in the target state enjoy a disproportionate (if not illegal) advantage in political competition, and their likelihood of political survival significantly increases. Regarding regime dynamics, external links with illiberal powers could distort the level of political competition and undermine the democratisation process.

The above discussion suggests the positive impact of economic links on the political survival of incumbent elites. It is worth bearing in mind that some factors can intervene in this causal mechanism. Firstly, the desire of incumbent elites to manipulate external resources is constrained by the institutional character, especially the difference between nominal and actual selectorate among regimes. Second, Cao and Ward argue that regime stability could influence decision-makers in calculating public goods provision (Cao and Ward, 2015). If incumbent leaders do not have high expectations of regime duration, they would be reluctant to offer public goods. In this case, external resources become significantly attractive for them to exploit. In other words, a shorter time horizon could amplify the influence of external links.

Before applying the selectorate theory in the context of Southeast Asia, the conceptual ambiguity deserves clarification first. Despite some degree of liberalisation since the 1980s, the overall regime dynamics in Southeast Asia fail to meet most democratic standards (Case, 2015). Croissant and Bünte classify Southeast Asian states into three distinct types: electoral authoritarian regimes, unambiguous autocracies, and countries undergoing democratic transition (Croissant and Bünte, 2011). The complex nature of the regime character increases the difficulty of operationalisation. Bueno de Mesquita et al. argue that the concept of “winning coalition” could offer “a more nuanced understanding of political dynamics than is achieved through the use of categorical regime labels” (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003: 55). By using information from the Polity Project, their operationalisation of the winning coalition set a 5-stage scale (from 0 to 1) to reflect different levels of winning coalition size (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003). However, this indicator still cannot capture subtle differences between formal institutional features and de facto configuration. For instance, the size of the winning coalition in Thailand after the 2014 coup was zero, according to Bueno de Mesquita et al. criteria because “military regimes are assumed to have particularly small coalitions” (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003: 134). However, this is an underestimation, given the role played by the Thai military in domestic politics. Therefore, indicators devised from the selectorate theory may not be sufficient to observe the theoretical expectation. Alternative research methods like process-tracing are needed to showcase the nuances of political interplay in different countries.

The following sections will examine these arguments by observing recent developments in four Southeast Asian countries. While the impact

of the “China factor” has been noted in the literature since the early 2010s, only a few studies directly address the effects of BRI.² This study intends to fill the gap by offering an up-to-date evaluation. China’s BRI did not launch until 2013, so its influence could only surface afterward. Therefore, political changes between 2015 and 2020 provide a suitable body of cases for examining the possible linkage between regime dynamics and “autocracy export” by Beijing. Before moving to the case studies, it is necessary to have a closer overview of the BRI and its presence in Southeast Asia.

3. BRI as a Conduit for Autocracy Export

Since President Xi Jinping proclaimed the ideas of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road in 2013, BRI has become the guiding strategy in China’s foreign policy agenda. The two arms of the initiative converge on Europe, with the Silk Road Economic Belt running along the land route via Central Asia. At the same time, the Maritime Silk Road “loops south and westward by sea towards Europe” (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2015). Officially, BRI is intended to strengthen connectivity among participating countries under the leadership of Beijing and build up China’s soft power internationally. In practice, the realisation of this vision mainly depends on two policy instruments: large-scale financial outputs and foreign direct investment.

In terms of financial output, Beijing has created several vehicles to channel surplus capital, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the New Development Bank (NDB), and the Silk Road Fund (SRF). In addition, primary banks and financial institutions in China, such as the China Development Bank (CDB), CIC Capital (a subsidiary of PRC’s sovereign wealth fund), and the Export-Import Bank of China (China Eximbank), are being used for similar purposes in BRI-related projects (Bermingham, 2016a; 2016b). According to the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), the cumulative amount invested under BRI from 2013 to 2018 has surpassed \$650 billion, and over 100 countries have begun cooperation with China within the BRI framework (Hsueh, 2020). Through this connection, outbound policy loans, equity investments, and acquisitions increased significantly from 2015. Additionally, government-to-government deals in the infrastructure and energy sectors held a large share (Bermingham, 2016b). Although China has been a major global investor since 2005, most of its investments went to advanced economies in the years before the BRI.

However, beginning in 2013, China deliberately redirected its outbound capital toward the developing world.

Generally, foreign direct investment plays a crucial role in establishing “connectivity” between Beijing and participating societies. Of the types of investment projects undertaken, infrastructure development draws a lot of attention. From the supply-side perspective, these investments were adopted to address China’s predicament of overcapacity (Zhou et al., 2015). Public and private enterprises were encouraged to go abroad and participate in a variety of projects (Schuman, 2015). For example, Beijing had invested significantly in energy production in Nigeria, Algeria, Russia, Venezuela, and Indonesia. It also continued its massive input in transportation construction in countries such as Cambodia (Chen and Yang, 2013). Following the announcement of BRI, the relevance of infrastructure construction was elevated to the extent that most people view BRI as synonymous with China’s highway/railway diplomacy. The attention to infrastructure projects under BRI ranges from transportation and communication (like optical cable networks), to the energy industry (power plants and electricity grids). Since most partner countries of BRI are keen to upgrade their infrastructure, Beijing’s proposals would be too appealing to decline. In an official document that discusses the “visions and actions” of BRI, facility connectivity is viewed as one of the five major aspects of cooperation (China, 2015).³

In terms of both size and scope, the BRI qualifies as the “external factor” in the theoretical framework discussed above. Massive output from foreign countries could significantly impact the target society economically and politically. Logically, countries with stronger “linkage” to China are more likely to regress along the autocracy-democracy spectrum. This study uses the CFR Belt and Road Tracker developed by the Council on Foreign Relations. The dataset collects information on Beijing’s policy output from 2000 to 2017, focusing on three indicators: imports from China, foreign direct investment (FDI) from China, and external debt to China (Steil and Della Rocca, 2019).

Table 1 reports changes in these indicators from 2013 (the year BRI was announced) to 2017 in Southeast Asian countries. Regarding FDI, most regional states, except the Philippines, received increased investments from China, with significant growth in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Myanmar. Regarding external debt, Thailand, Myanmar, Indonesia, and Singapore’s

liabilities accumulated rapidly after BRI's launch.⁴ Countries like Myanmar relied on Beijing's capital and investment to upgrade its economy after the military junta decided to liberalise the country. It also bears in mind that the rising power of the Chinese economy would generally increase Beijing's economic presence worldwide, and even relatively developed countries like Singapore have enhanced their connection with China. Therefore, a clear pattern of dependence emerges. Generally, all Southeast Asian states (except the Philippines) in Table 1 show increasing economic connections with China. FDI from China in Malaysia jumped from 0.2 per cent to 2.7 per cent in five years and Indonesia's debt to China doubled in the same period.

Table 1. Changes in the Economic Relationship between PRC and Southeast Asia after BRI

	FDI from PRC (percentage of inward FDI)	External debt to PRC (percentage of GDP)
Cambodia	5.9% (2013) → 3.0% (2017)	38.6% (2013) → 22.4% (2017)
Indonesia	0.9% (2013) → 2.2% (2017)	0.6% (2013) → 1.3% (2017)
Malaysia	0.2% (2013) → 2.7% (2017)	0.2% (2013) → 0.2% (2017)
Thailand	1.8% (2013) → 2.0% (2017)	0.5% (2013) → 0.9% (2017)
Philippines	0.3% (2013) → 0.1% (2017)	0.1% (2013) → 0.2% (2017)
Myanmar	0% (2013) → 56.5% (2017)	1.1% (2013) → 5.2% (2017)
Singapore	3.0% (2013) → 3.5% (2017)	0.4% (2013) → 2.7% (2017)

Source: *Belt and Road Tracker*. <https://www.cfr.org/article/belt-and-road-tracker>

4. The Southeast Asian Experience

According to China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, BRI implementation did not occur until 2015. Therefore, attributing political developments in the first half of the 2010s to BRI is problematic logically. However, in Southeast Asia, significant episodes of political change occurred in Cambodia (2018), Malaysia (2018), Indonesia (2019), and Thailand (2019), constituting appropriate cases of observation.

As stated above, not countries but specific elites survive the political competition. However, this causal mechanism is dependent on the actual configuration of power and time horizon. Simply put, countries with a larger winning coalition or longer time horizon are less likely to become victims of autocracy export. While all four countries had relatively close ties under

BRI with China, political survival occurred in most cases except Malaysia. Nevertheless, these countries' pre-election and post-election developments showed nuances that do not conform to theoretical expectations. The following discussion investigates the cases separately.

4.1 Cambodia

Among Southeast Asian countries, Cambodia is probably the model for a bilateral partnership with China. The Hun Sen administration is not embarrassed to defend Beijing's position on the international and regional stage. When the maritime disputes in the South China Sea intensified in the 2010s, Cambodia blocked ASEAN's efforts to reach a joint stance several times, undermining the legacy of regional solidarity. (Tomiyaama, 2016).

The 1997 coup was a watershed in the bilateral tie between Hun Sen and Beijing. Whereas it was condemned by Western countries and ASEAN (Cambodia's membership application was postponed as a result), China was the first country to offer friendship and help, and a strong relationship began to develop despite past rivalries during the civil war. It is estimated that approximately US\$10 billion capital was offered by China to Cambodia between 2003 and 2013, and projects ranging from infrastructure construction to special economic zone foretold the practices of BRI. The influx of Chinese capital allowed the Cambodian government to cultivate a network of crony politics that benefited both Chinese and Cambodian elites. The scam scandal exposed in early 2022 in the Cambodian port city of Sihanoukville vividly depicted the dynamic. Cambodia and China signed an agreement in 2010 to jointly develop the Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone (SSEZ) in the city. As Cambodia's largest special economic zone, SSEZ naturally became a landmark project after Cambodia officially became a BRI partner in 2016. The growing economic linkage can be observed in the rising number of Chinese nationals living in Cambodia. Compared with around 80,000 Chinese nationals living in Cambodia in 2013, 200,000 Chinese lived in Sihanoukville by 2019(Rim 2022). Moreover, Cambodia has become the regional hub of organised crime, suggesting the private rather than public nature that Chinese economic presence could contribute. Only those in connection with political power can enjoy the goods.

Domestically, the reciprocal mechanism helped Hun Sen to consolidate his winning coalition and prevail in the 2003 and 2008 general elections. The ruling party won three-quarters of Congress seats in 2008. Nevertheless, the

rise of the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP) in the 2013 election created a formidable challenge to the Hun Sen government, which resulted in the latter securing only 48 per cent of the popular vote. In addition, rising criticisms about human rights and the rule of law from Western countries and international society have increased Hun Sen's sense of insecurity. To secure political power, Hun Sen had to maintain its dependence on China's support, while strengthening its control over domestic society. According to a 2016 study, an additional \$13 billion has been promised to Cambodia (Kynge et al., 2016). Despite the declining trend in Table 1, Beijing remains Phenom Penh's most significant economic patron. The linkage is so strong that Hun Sen even contended, "If I don't rely on China, who will I rely on?" in a forum held in Tokyo in 2021 (Nikkei Asia, 2021).

Nevertheless, the more relevant measures occurred in the domestic arena. Hun Sen enhanced political repression against opposition leaders and activists after the 2013 election, obviously to restructure the political field. Thus, by dissolving the CNRP in 2017, imprisoning its leader, Kem Sokha, and clamping down on the media and activists, the ruling CPP quickly took all 125 seats in the 2018 general election. On the other hand, Hun Sen's plan to transform Cambodia into a personal dynasty surfaced in the late 2010s as he called for his comrades to retire with him together. In return, their children will inherit the positions and influences, and the new network of nepotism is under the leadership of Hun Sen's son Hun Manet (Brook and Rathana, 2023). The succession of the winning coalition was successful as Hun Sen officially handed over power to his son after the 2023 general election. Given these efforts, Hun Sen said the CPP would remain dominant for "as long as a century," and the opposition "should wait until the next life" (Reuters, 2020). The close partnership between Cambodia and China (cause) and the growing trend of the Hun Sen dynasty (effect) confirms the autocracy export thesis. However, a closer examination suggests the critical role played by the incumbent elites to exploit external support for political survival, and the prospect of democracy in Cambodia has faded away.

4.2 *Malaysia*

In 2018, for the first time, Malaysians declined to elect the National Front (B.N.) as the political leadership of the federation. The opposition Pakatan Harapan (P.H.) coalition, led by former premier Mahathir Mohamad, achieved an unprecedented victory in the lower house. The National Front

(B.N.) has encountered severe challenges since the mid-2000s, and Prime Minister Najib Razak's involvement in the 1MDB scandal was viewed as the primary reason for B.N.'s loss in 2018.

Established in 2009, 1MDB was a strategic development company aimed at driving long-term economic growth for Malaysia. However, its operation fell into a sophisticated fraud orchestrated by a Penang-based financier, Jho Low. Through his ties with Najib's stepson, Low gained Najib's trust and began siphoning money to satisfy the Prime Minister's family while embezzling company assets with Najib's endorsement and protection (Wright and Hope, 2018). With Low's generous donations, Najib overcame the risk of losing the general election in 2013.

The scandal began to unravel in 2015 and significantly diminished Najib's legitimacy. An investigation revealed that approximately \$700 million was channelled into Najib's pocket, and \$3.5 billion of the state-owned sovereign fund was allegedly laundered (Lee, 2016). To offset these losses, Jho Low went to China for help. In November 2015, China General Nuclear Power Group purchased the energy assets (13 power stations) from 1MDB at \$2.3 billion (Venkat and Carew, 2015). Two months later, one of China's largest state-owned enterprises (SOEs), the China Railway Group Limited (CREC), collaborated with Iskandar Waterfront Holdings to win the bid for Bandar Malaysia, an ambitious urban development project close to Kuala Lumpur with an estimated budget of \$53 billion over 15 years. Furthermore, CREC announced an additional \$2 billion commitment to set up its Asia-Pacific regional headquarters in Bandar Malaysia. Prime Minister Najib welcomed the investment swiftly: "A company like CREC moves very fast, so we have to respond equally fast" (Associated Press, 2016).

In June 2016, Jho Low visited Beijing to discuss the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) and natural gas pipeline projects with China's State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission. The proposed budget was twice the amount recommended by consultation agencies. Moreover, both sides agreed to utilise these projects to indirectly repay 1MDB's debt (Wright and Hope, 2018). The unusual format of these projects was justified by the grand vision of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), although the business rate of return is questionable. Political, rather than economic, motivation prevailed in projects like ECRL and Bandar Malaysia. Indeed, the excessive enthusiasm of the Malaysian leadership for BRI projects raised eyebrows in the media, and the Prime Minister was blamed for "selling his country to China" (Bowring, 2018).

In July 2016, the U.S. Department of Justice filed a civil lawsuit against Najib's stepson and Jho Low. The snowballing scandal placed significant pressure on the Malaysian leadership. Moreover, dissatisfaction began to grow within the ruling party UMNO. Former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and former Deputy Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin publicly chastised the administration and asked for Najib's resignation. During a case hearing on 5 September, 2016, Mahathir met Anwar Ibrahim at Kuala Lumpur High Court. The first meeting in 18 years between these former enemies signalled an emerging alliance against the incumbent administration. As the winning coalition showed signs of breaking up, the concern for survival occupied the Prime Minister. Najib increased political repression, removed dissidents from within the ruling camp, and forced the Attorney-General to retire to forestall the potential investigation against him. Moreover, his visit to China in November 2016 concluded with 14 agreements for projects reportedly worth \$34.7 billion (Siwage and Tham, 2020). These measures, combined with the continued suppression of opposition figures, led to NGOs such as Freedom House issuing warnings about the deterioration of democracy in Malaysia (Parameswaran, 2016).

Najib's attempts to consolidate power failed during the 2018 general election. Prime Minister Mahathir, after his victory, emphasised the need to review cooperation agreements with China. During his visit to China in August 2018, he expressed concern about "neocolonialism" in the presence of Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang and pointed out the desirability of "fair trade" (Hornby, 2018). The Pakatan Harapan (PH) government renegotiated the conditions of the ECRL and Bandar Malaysia projects to reduce the financial burden. The revised ECRL project cost 32 per cent less than the original budgeted amount. However, concluding that the PH government fundamentally changed its policy toward BRI would be difficult. In April 2019, Mahathir participated in the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing and expressed his full support for the BRI by delivering a speech at the ceremony. In addition to his desire to bargain for better terms, Mahathir's dramatic change of stance had much to do with political dynamics within Malaysia.

On the surface, the 2018 regime change in Malaysia challenged our theoretical expectations because close ties between Beijing and Najib failed to keep the incumbents in office. However, it is important to bear in mind that, from the very first day, the PH government has been struggling with

the structural predicament of Malaysian politics: ethnic rivalry. Malay elites' entrenched distrust of the Chinese population made the winning coalition susceptible to fracture. The fragile cohesion among coalition members made it difficult for the leadership to continue policies aligned with the public interest. Disagreements about power succession escalated in late 2019, leading to the resignation of Mahathir Mohamad as the Prime Minister and the collapse of the PH government on 29 February, 2020. The defection of MPs within the PH coalition and disagreements between Mahathir and his own Malaysian United Indigenous Party (BERSATU) indicated a significant change in the structure of the ruling coalition. Muhyiddin replaced Mahathir as the Prime Minister, and his government relied significantly on the support of UMNO to defeat the non-confidence motion launched by his former comrades.

In July 2020, the Kuala Lumpur High Court found former Prime Minister Najib guilty of corruption. Some activists considered the unprecedented verdict as a victory for the rule of law in Malaysia. Nevertheless, it might be too early to draw such a conclusion if relevant events are considered. For example, the Muhyiddin government appointed a new Attorney-General, and the graft case involving Najib's stepson, Riza Aziz, a central figure in the 1MDB scandal, was dismissed (Takashi Nakano, 2020). Moreover, Najib's appeal against the corruption verdict and remaining charges may deliver essentially different results given the record of the Malaysian judiciary.

For the Malaysian public, events since March 2020 have been a repeat of history, as old plots and characters have reemerged. Thus, the resolve of Malaysian elites to address corruption remains uncertain, especially at a time when they continue to welcome Beijing's investment projects. Prime Minister Muhyiddin vowed to proceed with the ECRL to stimulate economic growth, and the modified project faced another round of revision with a re-route (Barrock and Tan, 2020; Hart, 2020).

The political change in 2018 generated optimism about democratisation in Malaysia. Moreover, dissatisfaction with corruption allowed Malaysia to decrease its reliance on Beijing. However, the deep-rooted ethnic rivalry undermined the PH government's prospect of achieving its campaign promises. Political instability allowed China's economic presence to stay and maintained its "function" as the incentive for ambitious elites. From Najib, Mahathir to Muhyiddin, BRI remained the undeniable factor in Malaysian politics, and the prospect of democratisation turned dim again during the 2020 crisis.

4.3 *Indonesia*

The re-election of Joko Widodo (hereafter Jokowi) in the 2019 Presidential election was generally regarded as a victory for pro-democracy forces in Indonesia. As the first president who did not belong to the circle of traditional elites, Jokowi attracted significant support from middle- and lower-class citizens with his promise to bring equitable development and liberal politics to the country. The prospect of realising his promises naturally hinged on how the new government would respond to Beijing's BRI initiative.

The first term of Jokowi's presidency witnessed steady growth in Chinese investment, focusing on the transport, storage, and communication sectors. He strategically utilised Beijing's resources to realise his infrastructure development objectives. After attending the first BRI Summit in May 2017, he asked Maritime Affairs Minister Luhut Pandjaitan to prepare a list of priority plans that could become the subject of bilateral cooperation (Wahyudi Soeriaatmadja, 2019). In April 2018, Indonesian and Chinese companies signed an investment agreement for projects that included a steel smelter, a hydropower plant, and an industrial park, involving an amount of \$23.3 billion (Silaen, 2018). It was apparent that Jakarta intended to channel Beijing's resources to projects located in remote areas. Additionally, the Indonesian government, wary of the risk of increasing debt, emphasised the importance of private-sector cooperation (The Jakarta Post, 2019).

Financial considerations were the primary driver for Jakarta's choice of China as the bid-winner in the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway project. Apart from the lower cost (\$5.5 billion from China versus \$6.2 billion from Japan), the willingness of Beijing to accept a business-to-business scheme (without any contribution from the Indonesian public budget) excluded Japan from the competition (Tiezzi, 2015a). According to the deal, the 150-kilometer high-speed rail line was to be completed in 2019 to display the win-win cooperation between the two countries.

As the flagship project for China's BRI in Indonesia, the development of the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway after 2015 diverged from original expectations. The construction stalled due to land acquisition and the outbreak of the coronavirus. These challenges are primarily intertwined with Indonesia's domestic politics. Local resistance to land acquisition reflected a different approach to public construction in reformasi Indonesia, and the

Jokowi government had no intention to resume the old practice of top-down rule by fiat (Suzuki and Kotani, 2017). As a result, only 85 per cent of the required land was secured one year after the groundbreaking ceremony. It was reported that Jokowi tried to mediate a resolution of the land acquisition dispute himself, as he had previously done as governor of Jakarta. However, the idea became unfeasible when the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election began. Jokowi's relations with the incumbent governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, who is ethnically Chinese, soon became the target of criticism by the opposition groups. The resulting loss of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama and the blasphemy conviction of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama suggested how easily anti-Chinese sentiment could be mobilised. As a popularity-based leader, Jokowi could not neglect such a lesson, and the forthcoming presidential election would be no exception.

Indeed, Prabowo Subianto, the presidential candidate from the opposition camp, fiercely criticised Jokowi's congenial stance toward Beijing and accused the Jokowi government of "selling" the country. One widely circulated rumour suggested that by admitting Chinese investment, Jokowi allowed thousands of Chinese workers to migrate to Indonesia and fill job vacancies. As remarked by certain writers, "The impact of illegal Chinese workers is too obvious...in addition to our large debt to China" (Maulia and Tani, 2019; Siwage and Tham, 2020). Opposition figures employed misinformation tactics to mobilise public support and undermine the incumbent government, but the collateral damage to the bilateral projects underway could not be overlooked. Having been decried by populist Prabowo supporters as a Chinese puppet, Jokowi found it politically expedient to distance himself from China during the 2019 election. The original idea to exploit BRI for domestic infrastructure upgrades was sidelined, if not abandoned entirely. Even after his victory, Jokowi's stance toward Beijing showed little change as he attempted to depict himself as a defender of the national interest during the Natuna island incident (Yulisman, 2020).

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the high-speed rail project did not resume until the second half of 2020. The Chinese media continued to report on developments such as the tunnel breakthrough and the connection of continuous beams along the route (Xinhua Net, 2020). However, Jakarta's decision to invite Japan as a potential partner for extending the high-speed railway reflected Jakarta's caution about excessive reliance on Beijing. It

has been reported that the extension of the Jakarta-Bandung rail to Surabaya is now included in the priority projects listed for the 2020-2024 period. In addition, the President played a critical role in the decision to invite Japan into the consortium (Koya Jibiki, 2020).

It is clear that Indonesia took a cautious approach to the generous BRI offer despite the deepening economic ties between the two countries. Electoral politics mitigated the political impact of economic dependence on China. Nevertheless, it is still possible that Indonesia will follow the example of its neighbours. For President Jokowi to realise his vision of transforming Indonesia, he may need to resume the strategy of taking advantage of the BRI with little regard for its political consequences. Coordinating Minister Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan's visit to China in October 2020 was an intriguing illustration of such a possibility (Albert, 2020).

4.4 Thailand

The political situation in Thailand deteriorated again in 2013. Once recognised as the most promising example of democratic transition in Southeast Asia, the prospect of freedom and democracy suffered significantly in the military coup in 2014, the promulgation of the new constitution, and the enthronement of Vajiralongkorn in 2017. The new constitution created a political competition favourable to the ruling generals and their clients. In addition, the reluctance of the royal family to make political concessions has decreased the probability of compromise. Taken together, Thailand can currently be categorised as an electoral authoritarian regime.

Chronologically, the decay of Thailand's political regime coincided with Beijing's grand strategy of the BRI. Beijing's flagship project in Thailand is the Northeastern High-Speed Rail (Northeastern HSR), which connects Bangkok and Nong Khai, a city on the Thai-Laos border. From Beijing's perspective, this railway line constitutes an integral part of the Pan-Asia railway network that will connect China's Southwest with Laos, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore.⁵ Thailand proposed the Northeastern HSR in 2010 and sought technical assistance from China, and the "rice for high-speed rail" deal was concluded by the Yingluck government in 2013. This scheme remained unaffected after the 2014 coup (Tiezzi, 2015b). In December 2014, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang attended the memorandum of understanding signing ceremony.⁶ However, the Northeastern HSR did not proceed as smoothly as expected after its groundbreaking in December 2015 (Goh and Webb, 2016).

Behind the smoke and dust on the construction site, Thailand and China have been struggling to agree on the HSR project's terms. Korn Chatikavanij, former Thai Finance Minister and a proponent of the Northeastern HSR, emphasised the geostrategic interests that Beijing could acquire from the project, stating that China should pay for what it gets from the project and that the "financial burden should not fall entirely on Thailand" (Crispin, 2016a). Dissatisfied with the loan offer from China's Export-Import Bank (with a 2.3 per cent interest rate), Bangkok continuously demanded a more favourable deal and eventually decided to cover the expense of the first phase of Northeastern HSR with domestic funds rather than a Chinese loan (Thodsapol Hongtong, 2019).⁷ Moreover, the payment plan became another point of disagreement, as Beijing preferred payment in U.S. dollars rather than Thai Baht. Thus, the two sides did not ink the official contract of Northeastern HSR (phase one) until late October 2020, five years after the commencement of construction.

The severely delayed paperwork reflects the mercurial nature of bilateral ties. Initially, Premier Prayut cancelled the joint project in early 2016, stating that Thailand would build a revised line independently. However, when China failed to invite Premier Prayut to the first BRI forum in 2017, the military junta invoked the controversial Section 44 in the interim constitution to bypass the administrative obstacles and kick-start the project. Additionally, a consortium led by China Railway Construction Corporation Limited won the bid for Thailand's Eastern High-Speed Rail Link in December 2018, a centrepiece of Thailand's Eastern Economic Corridor initiative. This development was viewed as a milestone of China's BRI in Thailand.

Thailand's increasing reliance on China also occurred in the sensitive area of military cooperation. The Royal Thai Army has had a warm relationship with its Chinese counterpart since the 2014 coup. In late 2017, China delivered 28 VT4 battle tanks to Thailand, and it was later reported that the Thai Army intended to procure more VT4 tanks (Nanuum, 2019). Meanwhile, Thailand's navy decided to purchase China's Yuan-class (S-26T) submarines. Bangkok placed the order for the first S-26T submarine (with the intention of buying two more) in 2017 for US\$1.1 billion, and the military junta justified the submarine deal with the rising risk in the South China Sea. However, in April 2020, Bangkok suspended its second and third submarine orders due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic (Liu, 2020). Nevertheless, such a tentative suspension can be reversed at any time, as the

first submarine is expected to be delivered in 2023 (Parameswaran, 2019). Given Washington's lukewarm attitude towards the military government and pressure to resume civilian rule, it was rational for the ruling generals to seek a counter-balance by enhancing military cooperation with Beijing (Crispin, 2016b; Corben, 2016). The inconsistency between economic cooperation and military purchases revealed the weakness of Bangkok and undermined the efforts of domestic technical officials to push for better terms for Thailand under the Northeastern HSR project.

The aspiration of returning to civilian rule dimmed when the military junta promulgated a self-serving constitution and refused to hold national elections on time. The crisis of royal succession exacerbated the standoff. King Bhumibol Adulyadej, regarded as the authoritative mediator in political struggles, passed away in October 2016. His death was a natural excuse for the military junta to postpone the national election. In the 2014 coup, the military junta was not severely challenged, partly due to its promise to bring back stability and development. However, the public's patience diminished after the new constitution was adopted and the King's funeral in 2017. As a result, the ruling generals faced increasing pressure to lift restrictions on political activity and civil liberties.

Right after the coup, the military government had more leeway to shape the policy agenda concerning the HSR project (it was politically expedient to distance themselves from the Yingluck administration). Hence, disagreements regarding finance and land development along railway routes were seriously discussed (Sangwongwanich, 2016). To counter the pressure from Beijing, Thailand sought to cooperate with Japan on another high-speed railway project connecting Chiang Mai and Bangkok (Northern HSR) in 2015.

The growing pressure against authoritarian rule, together with the instability of the winning coalition following the royal succession, eventually compelled the military junta to hold a national election in 2019. Returning to the electoral process made it imperative for the ruling generals to form a winning coalition larger than before. In addition to the self-serving constitution, Thai generals, who could hardly be seen as defenders of democratic values, had no difficulty exploiting all possible resources to survive the political competition. Hence, the Northeastern HSR project's instrumental value prevailed over the public interest concern. The policy attitude of Bangkok towards the Northeastern HSR, even as similar projects

in Malaysia and Indonesia faced difficulties, became increasingly responsive to Beijing's demand. The political situation in Thailand did not stabilise after the 2019 elections, despite General Prayut's successful retention of the premiership. As democracy failed to resume, Thailand's dependence on China seemed to grow, as reflected in Bangkok's reluctance to restrict Chinese tourists during the COVID-19 pandemic and the finalisation of the first phase of the HSR contract later.

Table 2 summarises relevant variables and the political developments of four cases. All four Southeast Asian countries had rather close ties with China under BRI, and political survival occurred in Cambodia, Indonesia, and Thailand. Nevertheless, the pre-election and post-election developments in these countries showed nuances that justified the role played by domestic factors. The variation of winning coalition conditions the effect of autocracy export, and a smaller coalition size could increase the likelihood of democratic backsliding/authoritarian resilience. The power succession in Cambodia after the 2023 election offers the latest piece of evidence. On the other hand, the electoral democracy set in the *reformasi era* has been sustained in Indonesia, restricting political elites' desire to concentrate exclusively on their supporting groups. As a result, democracy in Indonesia remains stable compared with regional neighbours. Whereas incumbent leaders tend to exploit the convenient goods offered by illiberal powers, political survival does not necessarily lead to autocracy export. The dynamics of the selectorate group play a role in the result of regime evolution.

Table 2. BRI, political survival, and regime dynamics

	Economic links since BRI	Winning coalition*	Year of Election	Political survival	Democratic transition/ consolidation
Cambodia	Remain strong	Small	2018	Yes	No
Malaysia	Increase	Medium	2018	No	No
Indonesia	Increase	Large	2019	Yes	
Thailand	Increase	Medium	2019	Yes	No

Source: Collected by the author

5. Conclusion

By discussing four cases in Southeast Asia, this study offers an updated assessment of the political impact of China's BRI strategy. It provides an opportunity to evaluate the autocracy export in the regional context. Compared with the consensus on the geopolitical advantage that Beijing could benefit from, the effect of BRI on the target countries lacks objective evaluation but rather sentimental claims in the media. Concentrating on the strategic calculation of the ruling elites in BRI partner countries, we argue that China's BRI could influence recipient states' political dynamics. However, the mechanism between the cause (economic diplomacy of illiberal powers) and the consequence (regime dynamics) is neither straightforward nor associated with normative intention. The variation in the selectorate structures of respective countries could either increase or reduce the effect of autocracy export.

The empirical analysis finds that China's significant investments and capital-output offered an accessible resource pool that ambitious politicians could exploit for regime survival. Incumbent elites in Cambodia, Indonesia, and Thailand successfully remained in power after the inauguration of BRI. In Malaysia, the failure of UMNO in the 2018 election suggests the limits of abusing external resources. Nevertheless, the ethnically-distorted selectorate structure and short time horizon forced Mahathir and Muhyiddin governments to yield to the Chinese offer again. As a result, the optimistic prospect of democratisation in 2018 soon faded away.

The four cases discussed in this article all experienced major political episodes within five years of BRI's inauguration, but the political economy explanation also seems persuasive in other regional countries. In Myanmar, Beijing's importance has fluctuated since liberalisation began in the early 2010s. While the Thein Sein government was cautious about economic cooperation with Beijing, the National League for Democracy elites after 2016 had no problem accepting support from China. The veto power held by the military in the constitution renders an unusual selectorate configuration and makes civil leaders eager for survival. After the 2021 coup, the military junta resumed direct control of the country despite a shrinking winning coalition. Given the unending civil war, strengthening bilateral ties with Beijing was a natural turn for the generals. On the other hand, the demand for a larger winning coalition in the Philippines enables a more resilient democracy even after an autocracy-oriented and pro-China presidency.

Beijing made generous promises after Duterte expressed his desire for the China model, but the political dynamics of the Philippines failed to show the trend of democratic backsliding. While the alliance of Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Sara Duterte in the 2022 election can be taken as a sign of political survival, the subsequent developments fail to support the story of autocracy export.

Theoretically, this study confirms the need to address the target state's internal dynamics. While it is difficult to differentiate the impacts of the external factor on targets, the interactions within the target countries could be the key to understanding the causal effect. The empirical discussion of this article showcases that this domestic-oriented, rationality-based perspective offers persuasive analysis. Secondly, the analysis of four Southeast Asian states enhances our understanding of China in the area. Whether in mature democracy or staunch autocracy, incumbent elites consistently face the seduction posed by illiberal powers such as China. The prospect of avoiding democratic retreat hinges mainly on the operation of supporting measures. Finally, economic links derived from BRI primarily involve FDI and external debt; both seem to have less influence on target states than export dependence. However, projects under BRI in Southeast Asia, once finished, will eventually stimulate trade relations between China and these neighbours. In other words, BRI's effects may gradually emerge as time goes by. The political consequence of this BRI-related trade should be investigated carefully in the future, as Beijing's attitude toward autocracy export may change with its ascending status and growing ambition.

Notes

- ¹ As Risse and Babayan mention, the policy output of Western powers cannot be seen as a given, but varies with two conditions: stability and geostrategic concerns. Thus, “non-democratic regional powers will seek to countervail United States and European Union democracy support when geostrategic interests are at stake or when regime survival at home is at risk.” (Risse and Babayan, 2015) Bader et al. also have a similar observation and conclude that the incentive of autocratic regional powers toward regime convergence is weighted against the interest of political stability (Bader et al. 2010). In other words, the unstable condition of the target states could stimulate authoritarian powers to transfer incentives to action.

- ² For example, Bader and his colleagues (2015) take China as the case to depict their theory of regime export. However, their analysis only covers Beijing's behaviour towards Cambodia and Myanmar before 2010. Since 2010, significant developments have taken place in both the authoritarian power and target states. It is necessary to examine whether these new phenomena support or challenge the theory.
- ³ It is noteworthy that while Beijing's propaganda highlights transportation projects, a significant portion of the investments was made in the energy sector. Hence, some argue that BRI resembles the energy diplomacy agenda pursued before 2013 with the objective of satisfying China's demand in the future.
- ⁴ Although the dataset also reports the imports from China, this indicator is not included in this study given our focus on financial output and FDI. In addition, the implication of imports could be two-way rather than overwhelmingly dependent on China.
- ⁵ The Trans-Asia railway network was originally proposed in mid-1990s by Southeast Asian political leaders such as then Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed, and the idea was included in the long-term railroad network project by Beijing in 2004 (Wu 2016).
- ⁶ The original plan included two rail lines constructed by China to connect the China-Laos railway. On the other hand, Thailand decided to cooperate with Japan in the high-speed railway connecting Chiangmai and Bangkok a few months later.
- ⁷ In addition to the interest rate, Thailand refused to allow Beijing having access to the land-rights along the route, a condition China enjoys in many overseas railroad projects.

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Taiwan's Image in Thai Civil Services: Impact of 2022 New Southbound Policy

Pannavij *Tamtai**

International Doctoral Program in Asia-Pacific Studies,
National Chengchi University

Abstract

The New Southbound Policy (NSP) was the Taiwan's government policy under the President Tsai Ing-wen administration. The policy aimed to closely engage Taiwan with 18 countries in ASEAN, South Asia, and Oceania. Thailand was one of the countries. This study surveyed the Thai civil services' attitude of the nine related agencies toward Taiwan after the implementation of the policy in 2022. The sampling of the research was 120 Thai civil services of Knowledge Worker Position category (K category) of the nine related agencies to the NSP. The image of Taiwan was evaluated by 20 questions of seven indices which were visibility about Taiwan, description about Taiwan, preference for Taiwan, foreign relations with Thailand, policy evaluation on the New Southbound Policy, and policy recommendation. The questionnaire distribution and the survey operation followed the Thai government's One-China Policy. The participant answers were personal opinions. The values of Taiwan perceived in Thailand from the reflection of the perception of the Thai civil service sample was in a positive way. Technological advancement was the most admired image of Taiwan. Travel and tourism aspect was the most successful aspect of the NSP implementation in Thailand. Tourism was emphasized as recommendations to help tighten relations between Thailand and Taiwan.

Keywords: *Taiwan, New Southbound Policy, Thailand, Thai Civil Service.*

* Ph.D. Candidate, International Doctoral Program in Asia-Pacific Studies (IDAS), College of Social Sciences, National Chengchi University (NCCU), Taiwan.

1. Introduction

In 2016, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) leading by Tsai Ing-wen won Taiwan's general elections. Taiwan's government under the DPP administration has sought to engage with the Southeast Asian region. As a result, the DPP Taiwan's government launched the New Southbound Policy (NSP) in 2016. The New Southbound Policy is a comprehensive policy in many dimensions of Taiwan regional integration to South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Australasia. The main objective of the policy is to enhance cooperation and exchanges between Taiwan and 10 Southeast Asian partner countries (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam), six partner countries in South Asia (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka), and two partner countries in Australasia (Australia and New Zealand); and to engage closely with the regions (Office of Trade Negotiation, 2017, 4).

Taiwan's government seeks to cooperate with the New Southbound Policy partner countries toward building long-term strategic relationships, and building of a regional community. The policy works through five flagship projects and three potential business fields that are based on a mutually beneficial basis with the partner countries. The five flagship projects are the joint cultivation of talent to bolster industry and business in the region, medical and public health cooperation and development of industrial chains, the development of innovation-based industries, institutional agricultural cooperation and agribusiness ventures, and the organization of New Southbound Policy forums and regional youth exchange platforms. The three potential business fields are public construction projects, tourism, and cross-border e-commerce (Office of Trade Negotiations, 2017, 30).

This attempt of the Taiwan's government could be described as a re-new proactive foreign policy toward Southeast Asia after its foreign policy that started focusing on the region in the late 1980s. Chen (2002, 9-10) stated that the initiatives of Taiwan to involve itself in ASEAN were: wanting to join regional security in ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF); doing bilateral treaties; practicing as a mediator (interstate mediation); and economic cooperation by hiring Southeast Asian laborers coming to work in Taiwan and investing in Southeast Asian countries. Also, Thailand was one of significant achievements of the Taiwan's foreign policy initiative (Chen, 2002, 1).

2. Taiwan's Foreign Policy in the Image Making

In the past, Taiwan's foreign policies mainly emphasized on confrontation against China in claiming the right of ROC as the sole China and in gaining country status recognition (Chen, 2002, 6, 8, 12, 25). However, after Taiwan having more stability in politics and economy since the end of 1990s, having the first presidential election in 1996, and becoming fully democratic, the Taiwan's government under KMT's Lee Teng-hui administration started a new era of Taiwan's proactive foreign policy in emphasizing on Taiwan's society (being different from China's political identity and nationality, and Taiwan and Taiwan's citizens and residents) having their own interests (Chen, 2002, 6, 8).

Although Taiwan was not tied in diplomatic relations, the Lee government signed the highest numbers of (unofficial) trade and economic agreements with many Southeast Asian countries, showing the attempt of Taiwan in its proactive foreign policy under the Lee administration (Chen, 2002, 12, 15). Chen (2002, 20) called this phenomenon as pragmatic diplomacy of the Taiwan's government. The pragmatic diplomacy based on the sense of semi-official nature and not institutionalized in establishing and developing semi-official relations between Taiwan and other countries and international organizations, substituting for the absence of diplomatic relations of Taiwan and without interfering the other countries' official relations with China (Chen, 2002, 22). The pragmatic diplomacy of the Taiwan's government during the Lee administration focused on trade, investment, technological, education, socio-cultural issues, non-governmental groups, prominent figures cooperation rather than bilateral and multilateral relations in political, military, and legal.

According to the pragmatic diplomacy, the Taiwan's government laid the image-making strategies to the island. The Lee government presented and highlighted the democratic transition and economic success of Taiwan, a tolerant and politically liberal state with a world-class electronics industry, risk-taking entrepreneurs, cash-rich financial market, replacing the home of cheap toys producer and repressive politics image. The Taiwan's government also promoted the island as the first democracy in Chinese history, and a model of democratization for developing countries. As well as Taiwan could be a powerfully influential in the success of economic and trade derived from its democratization (Chen, 2002, 25-27).

After the millennium, Taiwan's government under DPP's Chen Shui-bian administration, kept presenting the image of Taiwan as having human rights, being democratic, and a peaceful nation. (Lee & Chan, 2023, 1). Then the Taiwan KMT's Ma Ying-jeou government added traditional Chinese culture as Taiwan's image resource to project to the international arena (Rawnsley cited in Lee & Chan, 2023, 1).

Later, the Taiwan's government under DPP's Tsai Ing-wen administration posted the New Southbound Policy as the re-new proactive foreign policy toward Southeast Asia. The Tsai government used the policy as a tool to involve into the regional community by transforming Taiwan's from relying on China single market to NSP's partner countries,¹ contributing to regional development, and attempting establishing Taiwan as a member of international community (Lee & Chan, 2023, 1), by using Taiwan's achievement in education, culture, business, and technology as soft power of Taiwan in doing cooperation with Southeast Asian countries (Ngeow cited in Lee & Chan, 2023, 2).

In history, the Taiwan's government attempted to use: socio-cultural engagement with the Southeast Asian region from the using of Mandarin-language melodrama films and sentimental songs toward overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia during the Cold War; investments and business ties of the Southward Policy² in 1994 during the KMT's Lee government continuing to the DPP's Chen Shui-bian administration in 2000; Taiwan's entertainment industry Mandarin pop music, Mandarin and Hoklo (or Hokkien) dramas and avant-garde films, bilateral education (vocational level) cooperation in training for Southeast Asian laborers (to serve Taiwan's factories both in the island and in the host countries during the democratization period) between 1990s - 2000s; and the Tsai Ing-wen administration's people-to-people relations of the NSP in 2016 (Lee & Chan, 2023, 3).

With Thailand, since the 1990s, Taiwan has engaged with Thailand: in economic and investment, the relocation of factories to Thailand; in environment and ecology, according to the relocation of Taiwan's factories into Thailand; in security, crime, and health epidemic, Thailand as a source of rare animal parts and endangered species, narcotics, and HIV smuggles and contacts to Taiwan. As well as Thailand is one of the top tourism destinations for the people of Taiwan. (Chen, 2002, 17-19).

3. The New Southbound Policy and Thai Civil Service Assumption

Thailand is one of the ASEAN partner countries of the Taiwan government's New Southbound Policy. The country is a major strategic country in the Southeast Asian region to Taiwan due to the location of the country which is located at the center of the region. The country's culture is also similar to Taiwan. Especially, there are many overseas Chinese communities situated in the country for the long history.

Taiwan and Thailand have had traditional friendship relations between the people of Taiwan and Thais for a long time. Since 1975, the Taiwan's government and the Thai government have continued relations and cooperation in the area of economic, investment, education, and culture (Thailand Trade and Economic Office Taipei, 2021). Taiwan sees Thailand as a hub of business and transportation to the Southeast Asian region (Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Thailand, 2021). There are many Taiwan's and Overseas Chinese businesses that have settled and invested in Thailand. The both governments maintain and strengthen the substantial relations and traditional friendship between the people in Taiwan and Thailand.

During the economic growth of Taiwan between the 1970s and 1980s, the Taiwan's government had used its wealthiness to substitute the absence of diplomatic relations by beginning doing cooperation projects with Thailand. Taiwan did an agreement in highland agriculture cooperation with Thailand Royal Project Foundation (RPF). Taiwan and Thailand have had cooperation since 1970 despite Taiwan and Thailand having the absence of diplomatic relations since 1975. The Taiwan's government has also granted scholarships for Thai students coming to study in Taiwan since the 1950s (Ku cited in Lee & Chan, 2023, 14-15).

Since 1988, all the presidents of Taiwan were of the Taiwan generation (born or/and raised in Taiwan island). They were elected by voting of Taiwan's citizens. They shifted and diversified Taiwan's foreign policies from upholding the Greater China ideology (Ku cited in Lee & Chan, 2023, 17-20) to promote economic and socio-cultural relations with Southeast Asian countries and Thailand: namely, expanding investment of Taiwan to Thailand, setting up Thai-Taiwan Business Association (TTBA) in 1992,³ delivering economic resources of Taiwan to Thailand, cooperation between Taiwan and the Thailand Royal Project Foundation and other economic projects since the 1990s, sharing the idea of democracy as a universal value to, and sharing political democratization to Thailand, strengthening people-

to-people relations as one of the objectives of the NSP to Thailand, providing scholarships and educational exchanges programs to Thai students, and providing job opportunities in industries for Thai laborers coming to work in Taiwan.

Moreover, according to the new visa regulation, since August 2016, Thai citizens have been eligible for the Taiwan's government's visa exemption program to exempt visa entry to Taiwan (Bureau of Consular Affairs, 2021). This program has tightened the relationship between the people of Taiwan and Thai people, advancing a good reputation of Taiwan and positive image of Taiwan in Thailand. Before the pandemic, there were Thai tourists who travel to Taiwan, for any purpose, increasing to the average number more than 100,000 per year (Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Thailand, 2021). The positive consequences from the New Southbound Policy have created positive image and good reputation of Taiwan to the Thai people.

Although Taiwan and Thailand have had non-diplomatic relations, the two sides still have (de facto) representative offices in Taipei and Bangkok with respect to the absence of diplomatic relationships. Taiwan's government established the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Thailand as the de facto Taiwan's representative office. As well as the Thai government established the Thailand Trade and Economic Office in Taipei as the de facto Thai representative office in Taiwan. There are several aspects in the relations between Taiwan and Thailand: economic and trade relations, labor relations, tourism relations, agricultural relations, cultural relations, overseas Chinese affairs, and visa service affairs (Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Thailand, 2021).

Thus, the role of civil services of Taiwan and Thailand are very important in the Taiwan-Thailand relations due to the most of foreign policy usually being formulated by the bureaucracy. In this case, Thailand is an important partner country of Taiwan in the New Southbound Policy. As the country is a bureaucratic polity, bureaucratic norms came to control decision making processes (Riggs 1966 cited in Ockey, 2004, 143-144).

Riggs (1966) stated the importance of Thai civil service toward policy decision making and constitution. Thai constitutions (as policies) have always powered civil service, vice versa. This means that Thai polity is ruled on behalf of bureaucracy, Thai politics and administration called bureaucratic polity. Thailand is a state bureaucracy in which most of the cabinet members (including political appointments)⁴ are former officials and civil services.

They are more responsive to the interests and demands of their bureaucratic subordinates rather than the concerns of interest groups, political parties, or legislative bodies outside the state apparatus. Also, some of senior or higher-level civil services are probably politically appointed to be cabinet members or political positions.

As mentioned, most of the initiatives in Thailand have come from the government and the bureaucracy. The bureaucratic norms come to dominate processes in the Thai public policies. Civil services in each ministry play an important role in the policy process, instead of the Thai civil society, especially in foreign policies.

The Thai civil services are an important factor in the country's policy process, especially for the agenda-setting, policy formulation, policy implementation, and policy evaluation about Taiwan-Thailand relations. The role of the Thai governmental agencies and civil service are very important and influential in facilitating the working of and implementing the New Southbound Policy in Thailand. Positive perception and image of Taiwan among the Thai civil services will help the New Southbound Policy to achieve its goal and will tighten positive collaboration between Taiwan and Thailand in prospective relations.

The institutional link between the New Southbound Policy and the Thai governmental agencies is very important to help Taiwan's government to achieve the goal of the New Southbound Policy in engaging multifaceted cooperation and establishing mutual prosperity between Taiwan and Thailand. According to the five flagship projects and three potential business fields, they relate to nine major Thai governmental agencies which are the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH); the Ministry of Education (MOE); the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation (MHESI); the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (MOAC); the Ministry of Tourism and Sports (MOTS); the Ministry of Commerce (MOC); the Ministry of Labor (MOL); the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA); and the Thailand Board of Investment (BOI). Particularly, these agencies are important as strategic agencies to the economic development of Thailand.

As Taiwan and Thailand have non-diplomatic relations, the Thai governmental agencies have relationships with Taiwan in the areas of economic, investment, education, and culture. The nine Thai agencies are representative of the Thai government in the field of economic, education, and culture according to the New Southbound Policy's five flagship projects

and three potential business fields. They are the main Thai governmental agencies that interact with the Taiwan government's policy projection to receive an effect and respond to a consequence of the policy.

Having a good perception of Taiwan and well knowledge about the New Southbound Policy among Thai civil services of the nine related Thai governmental agencies will facilitate the intention of the Taiwan's government in achieving the multifaceted cooperation and establishing mutual prosperity between Taiwan and Thailand. Therefore, it is important to address the perception of the Thai civil services toward the image of Taiwan according to the implication of the New Southbound Policy in Thailand. This survey on the image of Taiwan of the Thai civil service in the nine related agencies according to implication of the New Southbound Policy in Thailand will help the policy maker knowing of perception of Thai civil services toward Taiwan during the policy implementation leading to policy adaptation and to tighten relations between Taiwan and Thailand in prospective relations.

4. Survey on Thai Civil Services

The survey used a quantitative method which was a survey questionnaire to collect the perception of the Thai civil services in the nine related agencies to the affection of Taiwan by implication of the New Southbound Policy in Thailand in 2022. The population of this survey was Thai civil services of Knowledge Worker Positions category (K category).

According to the Thai Civil Service Act 2553 B.E. (2010 A.D.) and Thai Civil Service position classification and specification (OCSC, 2008a, 2014), The Knowledge Workers Positions category (K category) civil services work in policy implementation, policy formulation and developing a policy proposal. They are significant in implementing and crafting policy details.

The Knowledge worker positions levels (K category levels) of this survey:

Practitioner level (K1) is a position for a knowledge officer who carries out a duty under conduction, suggestion, and supervision;

Professional level (K2) is a position for an experienced officer who carries out a duty with his/her experience, knowledge, and skills in decision making and problem solving; as well as conduct, suggest, and supervise colleagues;

Senior professional level (K3) is a position for a very experienced officer who carries out a duty with his/her higher experience, knowledge, and skills in difficult decision making and problem solving; as well as conduct, suggest, and supervise colleagues for difficult decision making and problem solving;

Expert level (K4) is a position for an expert officer who carries out a duty with his/her highly expertise experience, knowledge, and skills in very difficult and complicated decision making and problem solving; as well as gathering data for providing as references and conducting researches which affecting inclusively, giving a lecture and training for departments;

Advisory level (K5) is a position for a proficient officer who carries out a duty with his/her most highly expertise experience, knowledge, and skills in the most difficult and complicated decision making and problem solving distinguishably recognized nationwide; constructing body of knowledge for providing references and conducting researches which affect inclusively in a wide variety of knowledge, findings, and public policies; and giving a lecture and training for ministries and public.

The sample participants were 120 Thai civil services of the K category of the nine related agencies to the implication of the New Southbound Policy.

Table 1. Sample Participants

Sample	Nine Related Agencies to NSP
120 Thai Civil Services of K Category	1. Ministry of Public Health (MOPH)
	2. Ministry of Education (MOE)
	3. Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation (MHESI)
	4. Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (MOAC)
	5. Ministry of Tourism and Sports (MOTS)
	6. Ministry of Commerce (MOC)
	7. Ministry of Labor (MOL)
	8. Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)
	9. Thailand Board of Investment (BOI)

The survey was conducted in Bangkok, Thailand, between October and December 2022. The survey questionnaire consisted of two sections, background information of participants and questions. The survey operation and the questionnaire design strictly followed the Thai government's One-China Policy. The participants were identified as anonymous, and their answers were personal opinions. The questionnaire content and the participants' opinions expressed were solely their own and did not express the views and policies of the Thai government agencies toward Taiwan. The questionnaires were originally designed in English and translated into Thai, and prepared in advance to prevent instances where participants did not answer a question.

In the question section, there were 20 questions which evaluated the images of Taiwan being perceived in Thailand from the reflection of the Thai civil service's perceptions in the nine related agencies to the New Southbound Policy and to present the perception of the Thai civil services toward Taiwan affected by the policy.

Participants' answers were given into five categories: a multiple-choices selection, a five-point scale, a yes-no answer, a ranking answer, and an open-ended answer. In the five-point scale, average score between 0 to 1.99 was defined as negative; average score between 2 to 2.99 was defined as neutral; average score between 3 to 3.99 was defined as positive; average score between 4 to 5 was defined as very positive.

Table 2. List of Questions

Questions	Answers
1. Do you know Taiwan, as a country or not a country?	Multiple-choices
2. Do you know the official name of Taiwan?	Multiple-choices
3. Please rate the overall image of Taiwan in each aspect	Five-point scale
- Friendliness	(1: Negative to 5:
- Technological Advancement	Most Positive)
- Free and Democratic	
- Wealthiness	
- Openness	
- Generously	

Questions	Answers
4. Please rate the excellent performance aspects of Taiwan - Economic and Trade - Science and Technology - Travel and Tourism - Agriculture and Fishery - Culture and Art - Academics and Education - Entertainment and Fashion - Medical and Healthcare - National Defense - Sports - Government, Administrative, and Law Enforcement	Five-point scale (1: Negative to 5: Most Positive)
5. What is your first impression or first coming up idea about Taiwan?	Multiple-choices
6. What do you know about Taiwan so far?	Multiple-choices
7. Please evaluate the present relationship between Thailand and Taiwan?	Five-point scale
8. Do you think Taiwan is a trustworthy friend for Thailand?	Five-point scale
9. Is Taiwan a role practice or a case study of Good Governance in Asia?	Five-point scale
10. Is Taiwan a role practice or a case study of public administration and public service delivery in Asia?	Five-point scale
11. Is Taiwan currently considered an important Asian partner of Thailand? 11.1 What factors do support your consideration?	Five-point scale Multiple-choice
12. Is Taiwan considered to have the potential to be an important Asian partner of Thailand in the coming years? 12.1 What factors do support your consideration?	Five-point scale Multiple-choices
13. Do you know that Taiwan's government has introduced the NSP to enhance and exchange with Thailand? 13.1 Do you think Taiwan's government sees Thailand as a priority partner country?	Yes-no
14. Do you think the NSP will help to tighten positive relations between Thailand and Taiwan?	Yes-no

Questions	Answers
<p>15. In the following aspects, do you think the NSP is working well in the relations between Thailand and Taiwan?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Economic, Trade, Business, Commerce - Science, Technology, Innovation, Industry - Agriculture, and Exporting Products - Medical and Public Health - Academics and Education - Travel and Tourism - Public construction and Infrastructure - Social connectivity and Exchanges <p>15.1 Please rank the aspects ordering from the most wanted cooperative to the least wanted cooperative between Thailand and Taiwan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Economic, Trade, Business, Commerce - Science, Technology, Innovation, Industry - Agriculture, and Exporting Products - Medical and Public Health - Academics and Education - Travel and Tourism - Public construction and Infrastructure - Social connectivity and Exchanges - Others (Please indicate.....) 	<p>Five-point scale (1: Negative to 5: Most Positive)</p> <p>Ranking (1: Most Cooperative to 8: Least Cooperative)</p>
<p>16. What area do you think Taiwan and Thailand should be more cooperative?</p> <p>16.1 How will the areas help to tighten positive relations between Taiwan and Thailand?</p>	Multiple-choices
17. Do you have suggestions to tighten overall relations between Taiwan and Thailand?	Multiple-choices
18. Do you have suggestions to make a distinction between Taiwan and China?	Multiple-choices
<p>19. Please rate your favorite overall image of the following countries and territories</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Japan - China - South Korea - Taiwan - USA - Australia - India - Russia - Hong Kong - Singapore 	<p>Five-point scale (1: Negative to 5: Most Positive)</p>
20. Please provide your suggestions to Taiwan for emphasizing its role in Thailand	Open-ended

This survey was performed using the most optimal sample size, focused on Thai civil service agencies that have the relations and interactions with Taiwan's agencies. Sample participants of this survey both some had visited Taiwan, and some had not visited Taiwan. Some had experience and knowledge about Taiwan, and some rarely had or did not have experience and knowledge about Taiwan. These assisted us in discerning the exact image of Taiwan perceived by the Thai civil service sample participants who saw Taiwan from their sincerity and visibility of Taiwan in Thailand, and provided directions for strengthening future cooperative exchanges between Thailand and Taiwan. The total number of sample participants and questionnaire was 120. The 120 questionnaires were distributed by purposive sampling to key people of each agency and snowballing distributed within their agencies. The sample participants were voluntarily welcome doing those questionnaires. The response rate was 100 per cent. Each questionnaire was completed in approximately 15 minutes. The answers and results in the survey questionnaires were reversionary translated from Thai into English. The list of sample participants is as follows.

Table 3. Number of Sample Participants

Agencies	No. of Sample	Levels	Location
1. Ministry of Public Health (MOPH)	17	K1-K3	Nonthaburi-Bangkok
2. Ministry of Education (MOE)	15	K1-K3	Bangkok
3. Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation (MHESI)	16	K1-K3	Bangkok
4. Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (MOAC)	10	K1-K5	Bangkok
5. Ministry of Tourism and Sports (MOTS)	15	K1-K4	Bangkok
6. Ministry of Commerce (MOC)	10	K1-K3	Nonthaburi-Bangkok
7. Ministry of Labor (MOL)	20	K1-K5	Bangkok
8. Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)	10	K1-K5	Bangkok
9. Thailand Board of Investment (BOI)	7	K1-K3	Bangkok
Total	120	K1-K5	Bangkok

5. Results and Findings of the Survey

Background of Sample Participants

The total number of sample participants was 120 from the nine related Thai government agencies to the New Southbound Policy. The list of sample participants' backgrounds is as follows.

Table 4. Background of Sample Participants

Background		Number of Participant	Per cent (%)
Agencies	MOL	20	16.7
	MOPH	17	14.2
	MHESI	16	13.3
	MOE	15	12.5
	MOTS	15	12.5
	MFA	10	8.3
	MOAC	10	8.3
	MOC	10	8.3
	BOI	7	5.8
Genders	Male	39	32.5
	Female	81	67.5
Ages	20-25	7	5.8
	26-30	12	10
	31-35	31	25.8
	36-40	30	25
	41-45	23	19.2
	46-50	8	6.7
	51-55	7	5.8
	56-60 and above	2	1.7
Levels of Education	Bachelor's	36	30
	Master's	66	55
	Ph.D.	16	13.3
	Dr.	2	1.7
Levels	Practitioner (K1)	48	40
	Professional (K2)	43	35.8
	Senior (K3)	23	19.2
	Expert (K4)	2	1.7
	Advisory (K5)	3	2.5
Years of Service	0-5	37	30.8
	6-10	38	31.7
	11-15	17	14.2
	16-20	12	10
	21-25	7	5.8
	26-30	4	3.3
	31-35 and above	5	4.2
Total		120	100

Figure 1. Number of Agencies and Participants

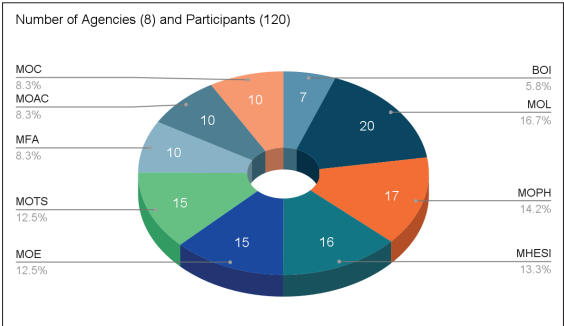


Figure 2. Number of Participants' Levels

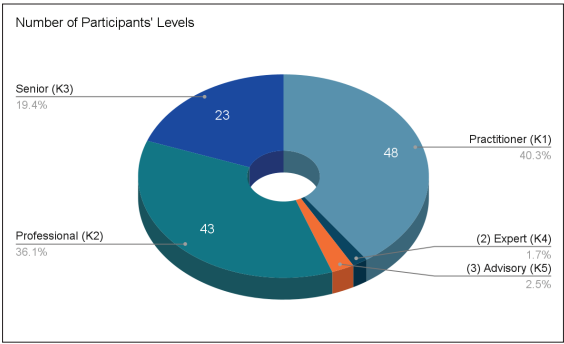
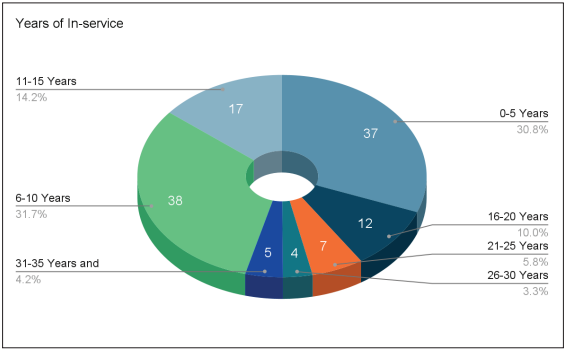


Figure 3. Sample Participants' Years of In-service



Visibility about Taiwan

There were four questions that surveyed perceptions of the K category Thai civil service sample toward Taiwan in general perspectives, asking about individual opinions of each participant's perception toward their knowledge of Taiwan and their consideration about Taiwan in daily life. Thai civil service samples said Taiwan a country in their personal statement (50%); never saying Taiwan being a country (21.7%); saying Taiwan being as a country by definitions of international law and the theory of statehood (8.3%); saying Taiwan being not a country following Thai government's One-China Policy (20%). They perceived the official name of Taiwan as the Republic of China, ROC (43.3%); while perceiving the official name of Taiwan as Chinese Taipei (41.7%); and thinking of Taiwan as the People's Republic of China, PRC (15%).

Table 5. Visibility about Taiwan

Visibility about Taiwan		Number of Participant	Per cent (%)
1. Do you know Taiwan?	As a Country	60	50
	Not a Country	26	21.7
	As a Country by IL and Theory	10	8.3
	Not a Country by One-China Policy	24	20
2. Do you know the official name of Taiwan?	ROC.	52	43.3
	PRC.	18	15
	Chinese Taipei	50	41.7

Figure 4. Visibility about Taiwan

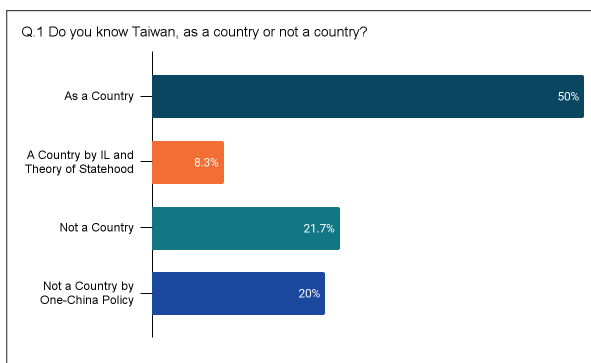
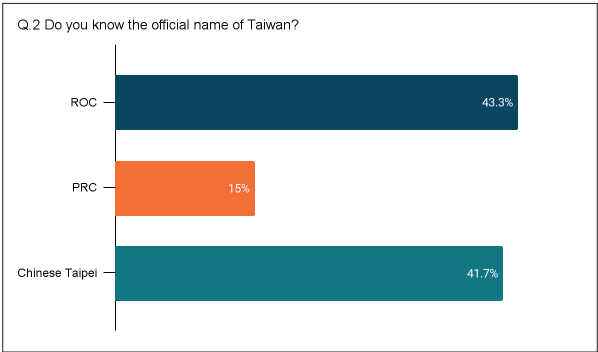


Figure 5. Knowing of the Official of Taiwan

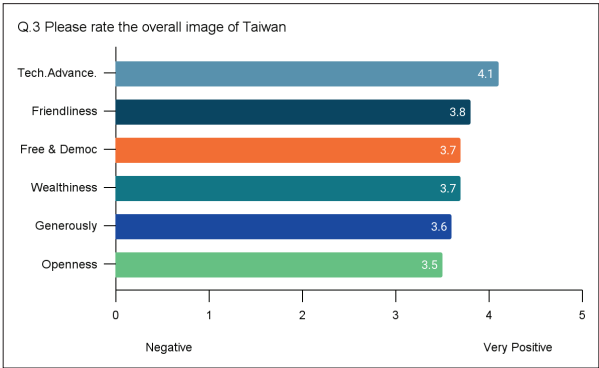


Overall image of Taiwan was positive to very positive among the Thai civil service in every aspect. Taiwan is renowned for hi-tech industries, the warm-hearted people of Taiwan, and political and economic development. The overall image of Taiwan perceived by the Thai civil service samples of this survey; the most positive image was technological advancement (average total score 4.1). Followed by friendliness (average total score 3.8). The political and economic developments of Taiwan are well-perceived among the Thai civil service. Thus, the free and democratic images of Taiwan (average total score 3.7); and wealthiness (average total score 3.7). The image of Taiwan helping other countries is impressive to foreigners. Generosity Taiwan was scored positively (average total score 3.6). As well as the open society image of Taiwan (average total score 3.5) was still perceived positively.

Table 6. Overall Image of Taiwan

Visibility about Taiwan		Average Total Score
3. Please rate the overall image of Taiwan, from 1-5 Score (1 = negative, 5 = most positive)	Technological Advancement	4.1
	Friendliness	3.8
	Free and Democratic	3.7
	Wealthiness	3.7
	Generously	3.6
	Openness	3.5

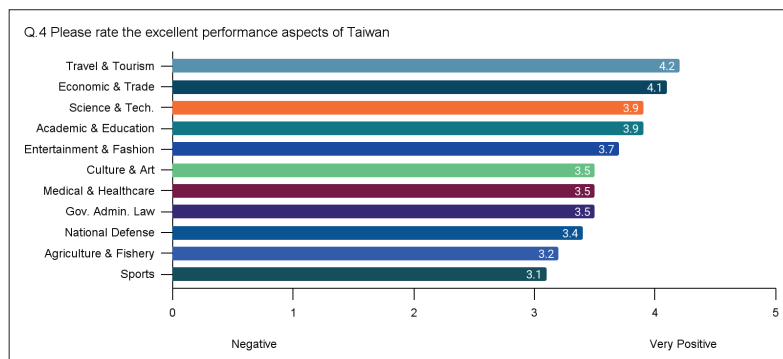
Figure 6. Overall Image of Taiwan



Taiwan has a reputation in many aspects. Parallel with the overall image of Taiwan, Taiwan’s performance, ability, and capability were seen as achievements of Taiwan by the Thai civil services’ eyesight. Travel and Tourism (average total score 4.2); and Economic and Trade (average total score 4.1) of Taiwan were very impressive to the samples. In addition, Science and Technology (average total score 3.9); and Academics and Education (average total score 3.9) of Taiwan were impressive to the samples. The rest aspects resulting from the above-mentioned aspects were still impressed by the Thai civil services in positive scores: Entertainment and Fashion (average total score 3.7); Culture and Art (average total score 3.5); Medical and Healthcare (average total score 3.5); and Government, Administrative, and Law (average total score 3.5). They were factors to support each other in the achievement of Taiwan.

Table 7. Excellent Performance Aspects of Taiwan

Visibility about Taiwan		Average Total Score
4. Please rate the excellent performance aspects of Taiwan, from 1-5 Score (1 = negative, 5 = most positive)	Travel and Tourism	4.2
	Economic and Trade	4.1
	Science and Technology	3.9
	Academic and Education	3.9
	Entertainment and Fashion	3.7
	Culture and Art	3.5
	Medical and Healthcare	3.5
	Government, Administrative, Law	3.5
	National Defense	3.4
	Agriculture and Fishery	3.2
	Sports	3.1

Figure 7. Excellent Performance Aspects of Taiwan

Descriptions about Taiwan

The civil service sample participants had experienced Taiwan in some ways. The participants gave answers mostly in two periods of time. The first perception or first knowledge about Taiwan, before they faced experiences about Taiwan but had some knowledge about Taiwan (to answer the question of first impression about Taiwan). After facing experiences and having more knowledge about Taiwan and/or having been to Taiwan, to answer the question of knowledge about Taiwan so far. Their answers were mostly in three aspects: soft power of Taiwan, Taiwan as a tourist destination, and its relations with Thailand.

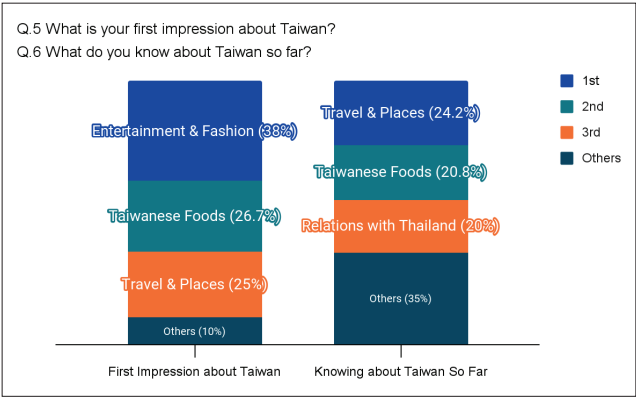
Table 8. First Impression about Taiwan

Description about Taiwan		Per cent (%) of Answer
5. What is your first impression or first coming up idea about Taiwan? (The most three answers)	1. Entertainment and Fashion Aspects	38
	2. Taiwanese Foods	26.7
	3. Traveling to Taiwan, Places and Landmarks of Taiwan	25

Table 9. Knowing about Taiwan So Far

Description about Taiwan		Per cent (%) of Answer
6. What do you know about Taiwan so far? (The most three answers)	1. Traveling to Taiwan, Places and Landmarks of Taiwan	24.2
	2. Taiwanese Foods	20.8
	3. Relations with Thailand	20

Figure 8. Descriptions about Taiwan



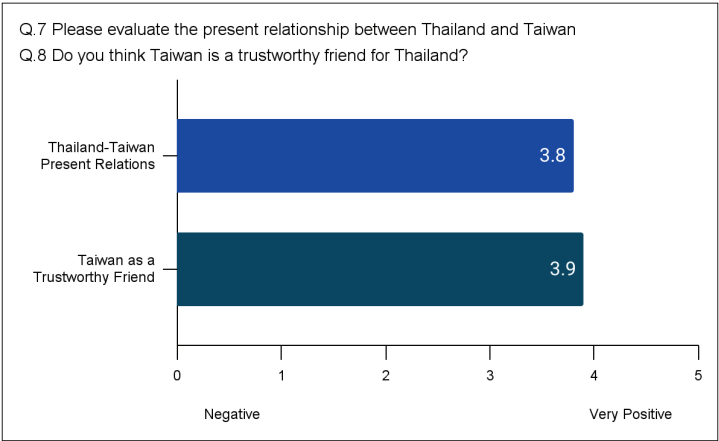
Preference for Taiwan

Although there is the diplomatic obstacle, the relationship between Thailand and Taiwan is still firm and close to each other due to the long traditional friendship and mutual benefits in economic, academics, and culture. The Thai civil service sample participants viewed the present relations between Thailand and Taiwan being nearly very positive (average total score 3.8). As well as Taiwan being a trustworthy friend for Thailand, the samples were able to separate between the political matter and the friendship matter. The participants still recognized the friendship relations nearly very positively (average total score 3.9). They showed that long friendship relations with Taiwan had other important areas besides politics. Individually, Thai civil services and Taiwan’s civil services relations are firmly to each other.

Table 10. Preference for Taiwan

Preference for Taiwan	Average Total Score
7. Please evaluate the present relationship between Thailand and Taiwan, from 1-5 Score	3.8
8. Do you think Taiwan is a trustworthy friend for Thailand? (Please rate from 1-5 Score)	3.9

Figure 9. Preference for Taiwan

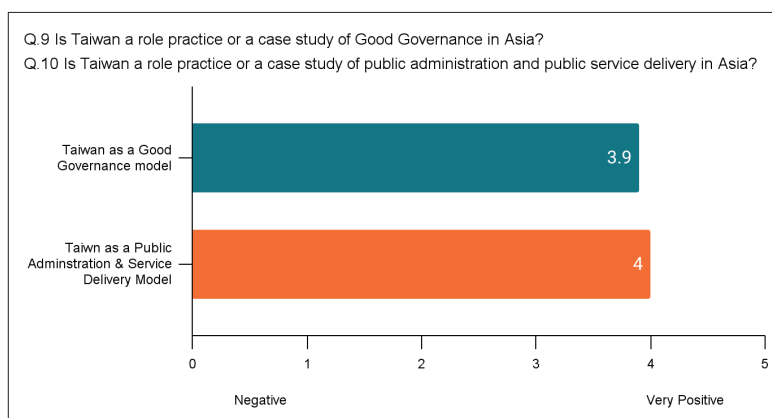


Perception toward Governance and Administration

In the governance and public administration areas, Taiwan has gained a reputation in Good Governance, and public administration and public service delivery. The image of being a model of public governance and public administration in Asia of Taiwan among Thai civil services, the sample participants responded to having a very positive image of Taiwan's role practice in Good Governance (average total score 3.9), and in public administration and public service delivery (average total score 4). Specifically, most participants were impressed by very good images of Taiwan in transparency and accountability, public services, infrastructure, transportation, country and economic development, public health during the Covid-19, and people centric.

Table 11. Perception toward Governance and Administration of Taiwan

Perception toward Governance and Administration	Average Total Score
9. Is Taiwan a role practice or a case study of Good Governance in Asia? (Please rate from 1-5 Score)	3.9
10. Is Taiwan a role practice or a case study of public administration and public service delivery in Asia? (Please rate from 1-5 Score)	4

Figure 10. Perception toward Governance and Administration of Taiwan

Foreign Relations with Thailand

This set of questions explored the opinion of the Thai civil service sample participants regarding the importance of Taiwan as an Asian partner to Thailand. Since Thailand does not have diplomatic relations with Taiwan, thus the two authorities have not had state relations with each other. The state relations between Thailand and Taiwan have been obstructed for many decades. However, the participants gave a nearly very positive score (average total score 3.8) to Taiwan as an important Asian partner of Thailand due to being an active economic and trade partner of Taiwan. Also, the participants saw the potential of Taiwan to be more important to Thailand in the coming years in a very positive way (average total score 4). The samples provided reasons as follows.

Table 12. Foreign Relations with Thailand

Foreign Relations with Thailand		Average Total Score	
11. Is Taiwan currently considered an important Asian partner of Thailand? (Please rate from 1-5 Score)		3.8	
11.1 What factors do support your consideration? (The most three factors)	1. Trade, Investment, Export, and Import between Taiwan and Thailand	%	34.2
	2. Strong Economic, Finance, Businesses of Taiwan	of	30.8
	3. Labor Relations, Jobs, Working Opportunities of Taiwan to Thais	Answer	30

Foreign Relations with Thailand		Average Total Score	
12. Is Taiwan considered to have the potential to be an important Asian partner of Thailand in the coming years? (Please rate from 1-5 Score)		4	
12.1 What factors do support your consideration? (The most three factors)	1. Labor Relations, Jobs, Working Opportunities of Taiwan to Thais	%	32.5
	2. Thais Traveling to Taiwan, Places and Landmarks of Taiwan	of	30
	3. Trade, Investment, Export, and Import between Taiwan and Thailand	Answer	29.2

Figure 11. Foreign Relations with Thailand

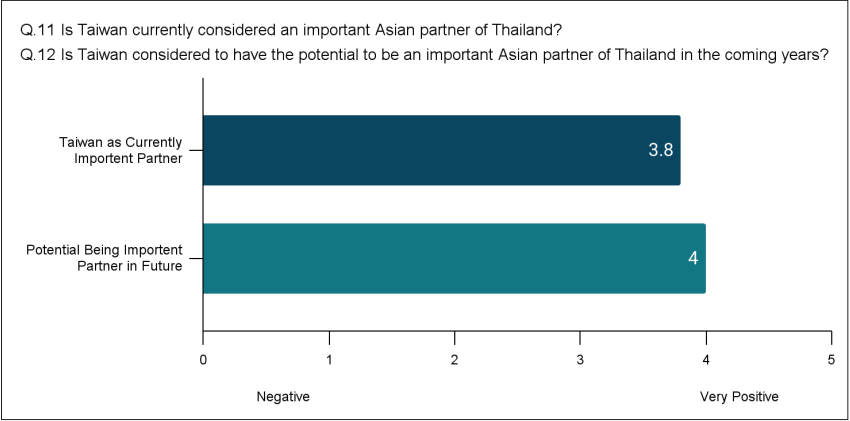


Figure 12. Factors to Support being an Important Partner

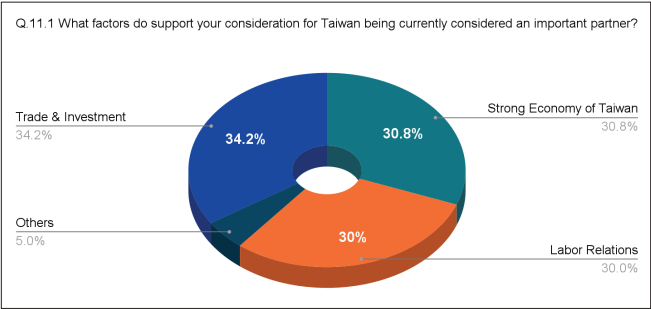
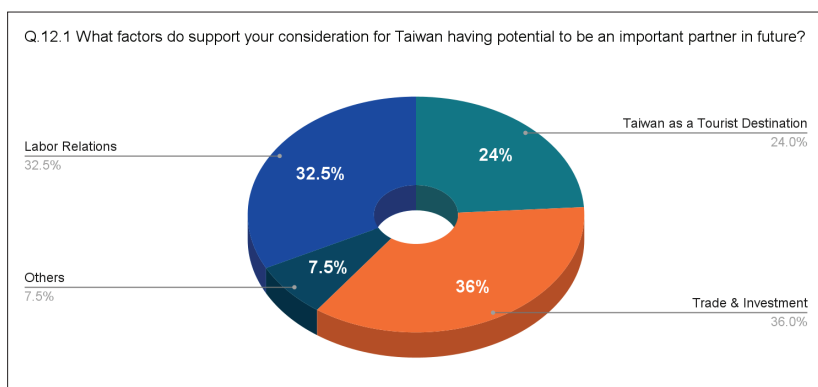


Figure 13. Factors to Support Being an Important Partner in the Future

Policy Evaluation on the New Southbound Policy

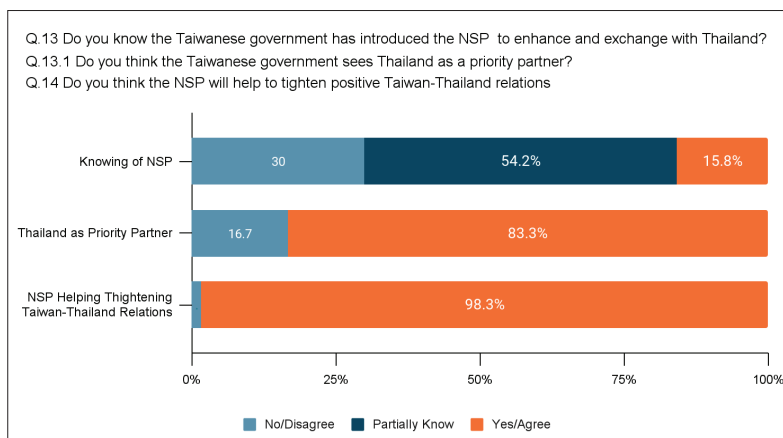
Since 2016, the Taiwan's government has implemented the New Southbound Policy through several exchanges with the Thai government agencies via the five flagship projects and three potential fields. The civil service sample participants of this survey came from the nine Thai government agencies relating to the NSP. They evaluated the working of NSP in Thailand, their assessments following these questions.

The participants who worked at the nine related agencies; a total of 15.8% of the participants knew about the NSP introduced in Thailand; 54.2% partially knew about the NSP introduced in Thailand in some aspects (e.g., visa exemption for Thai citizens traveling to Taiwan, scholarships for Thai students going to study in Taiwan); and 30% of the participants did not know about it before doing the survey questionnaire. The New Southbound Policy is a specific foreign policy of Taiwan toward Southeast Asian countries and others. The policy is too specific for civil services who are not in the field of foreign affairs, even Taiwan's civil services. However, they thought high-positively (83.3%) that the Taiwan's government had paid high attention to Thailand giving the country as a top priority partner in the NSP. In addition, a total of 98.3% of the participants strongly believed that the NSP would help to tighten positive relations between Taiwan and Thailand.

Table 13. Evaluation on the NSP

Evaluation on the NSP		Number of Participant	Per cent (%)
13. Do you know the Taiwanese government has introduced the NSP to enhance and exchange with Thailand?	Yes	19	15.8
	Partially know in some aspects	65	54.2
	No	36	30
13.1 Do you think the Taiwanese government sees Thailand as a priority partner country?	Yes	100	83.3
	No	20	16.7
14. Do you think the NSP will help to tighten positive relations between Taiwan and Thailand?	Agree	118	98.3
	Disagree	2	1.7

Figure 14. Perceiving and Knowing of the NSP in Thailand



There are eight NSP aspects working in Thailand according to the five flagship projects and three potential business fields: 1) Economic, Trade, Business, and Commerce; 2) Science, Technology, Innovation, and Industry; 3) Agriculture, and Exporting Products; 4) Medical and Public Health; 5) Academics and Education; 6) Travel and Tourism; 7) Public Construction and Infrastructure; and 8) Social connectivity and Exchanges.

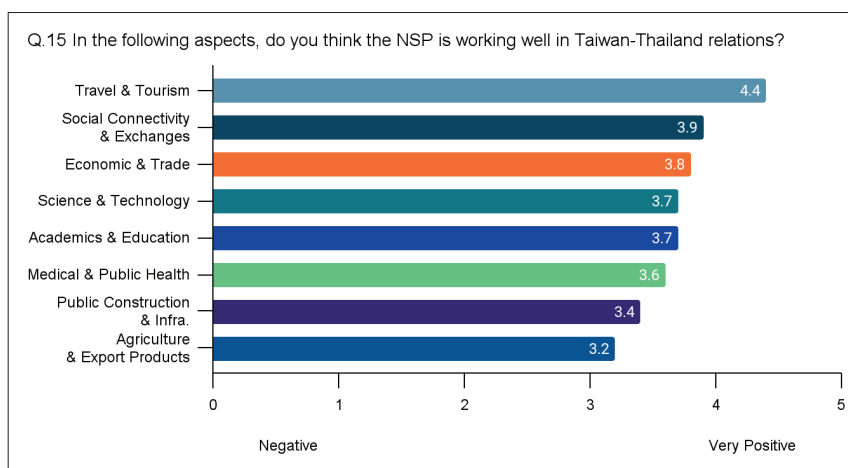
From the participants' point of view, tourism was the first rank (average total score 4.4) most working well in Thailand evidently from statistical numbers of Thai people traveling to Taiwan. The following aspects were social connectivity (average total score 3.9) and economic (average total score 3.8) due to the increasing number of Thai people traveling to Taiwan in

recent years leading to more social and economic exchanges between Thais and the people of Taiwan. The other aspects were still positively working in Thailand: science and technology (average total score 3.7); academics and education (average total score 3.7); medical and public health (average total score 3.6). The bottom lines were construction (average total score 3.4) and agriculture aspect (average total score 3.2) due to the cooperation being only in specific areas and not being publicly recognized.

Table 14. Working of the NSP in Thailand

Evaluation on the NSP		Average Total Score
15. In the following aspects, do you think the NSP is working well in the relations between Taiwan and Thailand? (Please rate from 1-5 Score)	Travel and Tourism	4.4
	Social Connectivity and Exchanges	3.9
	Economic, Trade, Business, & Commerce	3.8
	Science, Technology, Innovation, & Industry	3.7
	Academics and Education	3.7
	Medical and Public Health	3.6
	Public Construction and Infrastructure	3.4
	Agriculture, and Exporting Products	3.2

Figure 15. Working of the NSP in Thailand

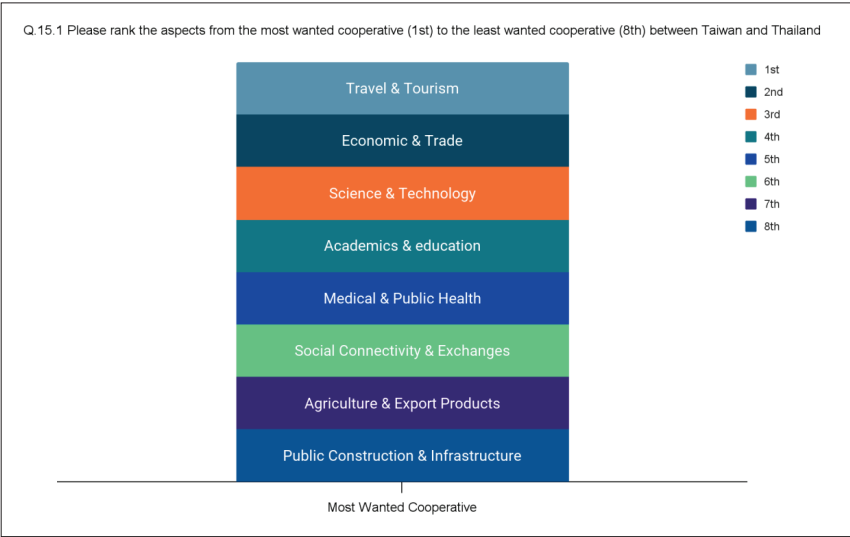


From each participant's perspective, most participants ranked the travel and tourism aspect as the most wanted working cooperative aspect of the NSP between Taiwan and Thailand due to the high statistical numbers of Thai people traveling to Taiwan. On the contrary, most participants ranked public construction and infrastructure as the least wanted cooperative aspect of the NSP between Taiwan and Thailand due to the cooperation being not widely publicized.

Table 15. Wanted Cooperative Aspects between Taiwan and Thailand

Evaluation on the NSP	
15.1 Please rank the aspects ordering (1st to 8th) from the most wanted cooperative (1st) to the least wanted cooperative (8th) between Taiwan and Thailand?	1. Travel and Tourism
	2. Economic, Trade, Business, & Commerce
	3. Science, Technology, Innovation, & Industry
	4. Academics and Education
	5. Medical and Public Health
	6. Social Connectivity and Exchanges
	7. Agriculture, and Exporting Products
	8. Public Construction and Infrastructure

Figure 16. Wanted Cooperative Aspects between Taiwan and Thailand



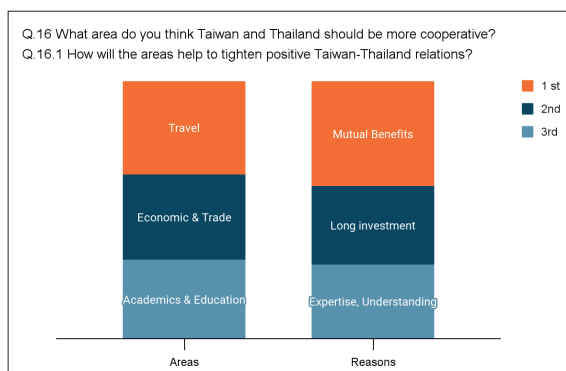
Policy Recommendations

As the New Southbound Policy focused on increasing cooperation with Thailand and granting visa exemption entry for Thai citizens traveling to Taiwan, there was a significantly increasing number of Thai people going to Taiwan for any purpose. Thus, most participants recommended that the areas of travel and tourism; economic and trade; and academics and education should have more cooperation between Taiwan and Thailand, since the areas would create immediate positive effects on the image of Taiwan. These areas will create mutual benefits for Taiwan and Thailand; will create understanding and exchange between Thai people and the people of Taiwan; are easy to instill knowledge about Taiwan into Thai people and good for Taiwan in long-term benefits; and are easy to implement due to the Taiwan's expertise and reputation.

Table 16. Policy Recommendations

Policy Recommendation		Per cent (%) of Answer
16. What area do you think Taiwan and Thailand should be more cooperative? (The most three areas)	1. Travel	51.7
	2. Economic and Trade	47.5
	3. Academics and Education	43.3
16.1 How will the areas help to tighten positive relations between Taiwan and Thailand? (The most three reasons)	1. Having mutual benefits	45
	2. Long investment for Taiwan to Thai society	33.3
	3. Taiwan's expertise and reputation	31.7
	Boosting understanding, knowledge, exchange	31.7

Figure 17. Policy Recommendations

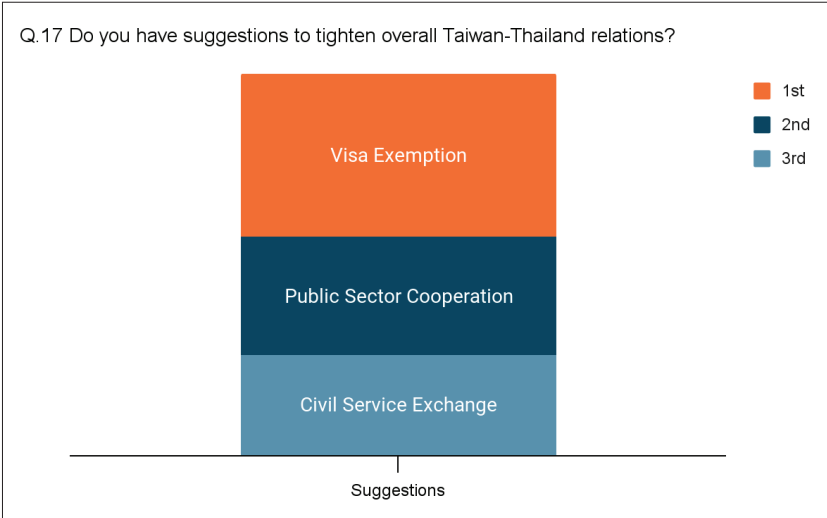


In addition, the sample participants suggested both sides to tighten overall relations between Taiwan and Thailand in general ways for civil service and creating a good image and reputation for Taiwan. They recommended Thailand and Taiwan should do bilateral agreement in entitle visa exemption. At the present, only Taiwan's side had entitled visa exemption for the Thai citizen period of a period of 14 days to Taiwan since 2016. While Taiwan's citizens needed to apply for a visa on arrival to Thailand for a period of 30 days. It would be better if the visa exemption measure was permanently entitled and extended the longer period of stay for both sides. Also, doing more cooperation and exchange programs between Thai and Taiwan's civil services would tighten public sector relations between Taiwan and Thailand that led to bilateral relations between the two authorities in the future.

Table 17. Suggestions toward Taiwan-Thailand Relations

	Policy Recommendation	Per cent (%)
17. Do you have suggestions to tighten overall relations between Taiwan and Thailand? (The most three options)	1. Continuing visa exemption measure	45
	2. Doing more cooperation in public sector	32.5
	3. Doing many civil services exchange programs	27.5

Figure 18. Suggestions toward Taiwan-Thailand Relations

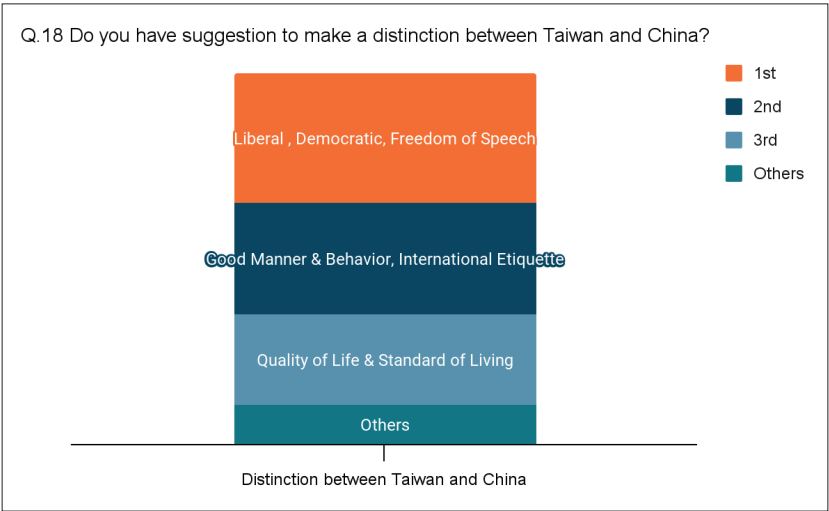


The sample participants also suggested the prominent features of Taiwan and the people of Taiwan from the civil service perspectives mainly in politics, characteristics, and living. They can be Taiwan’s features to be promoted in future.

Table 18. Distinction between Taiwan and China

Policy Recommendation		Per cent (%) of Answer
18. Do you have suggestions to make a distinction between Taiwan and other Chinese speaking countries? (The most three prominent features of Taiwan or Taiwanese people)	1. Being liberal, democratic, Freedom of Speech	35
	2. Having good manner, etiquette, and behavior	30
	3. Having good quality of life and high standard of living	24.2

Figure 19. Distinction between Taiwan and China

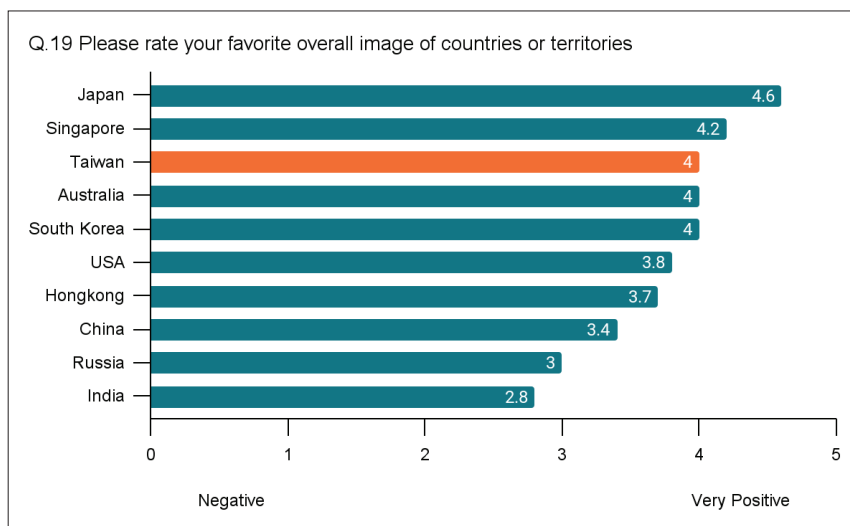


Finally, among the following countries and territories, the Thai civil service viewed Taiwan in a very positive image. They ranked Taiwan at the third place (average total score 4) as the same middle power countries as Australia and South Korea. Taiwan’s received score was above the superpower countries like the US, China, and Russia.

Table 19. Favorite Overall Image of Countries and Territories

Overall Favorite Image		Average Total Score
19. Please rate your favorite overall image of the following countries and territories, from 1-5 Score. (1 = negative, 5 = most positive)	1. Japan	4.6
	2. Singapore	4.2
	3. Australia	4
	South Korea	4
	Taiwan	4
	6. USA	3.8
	7. Hong Kong	3.7
	8. China	3.4
	9. Russia	3
	10. India	2.8

Figure 20. Favorite Overall Image of Countries and Territories



6. Conclusion and Suggestions

We could simply evaluate the working of the New Southbound Policy in Thailand by comparing between the given scores of 120 Thai civil services' perception on the excellent performance aspects of Taiwan as the general perception (not specifically coming from the NSP) toward Taiwan in the Thai civil services' eyes' sights⁵ and the evaluative scores of 120 Thai

civil services (after the NSP implementing in Thailand) toward the NSP aspects working in Thailand according to the five flagship projects and three potential business fields,⁶ by using the T-Test statistical method⁷ in six mutual aspects. The six mutual aspects were travel and tourism, economic and trade, science and technology, academics and education, medical and public health, and agriculture.

Table 20. T-Test Results

Aspects	General Perception toward excellent performance aspects of Taiwan	The NSP implementing in Thailand	T-Test (90% Conf. Interval) $\Pr(T > t) =$
Travel and Tourism	4.2	4.4	0.0021
Economic and Trade	4.1	3.8	0.0012
Science and Technology	3.9	3.7	0.1005
Academic and Education	3.9	3.7	0.0027
Medical and Public Health	3.5	3.6	0.0861
Agriculture	3.2	3.2	0.6393

Generally, the Thai civil services' perception toward excellent performance aspects of Taiwan and the Thai civil services' perception (after the NSP implementing in Thailand) toward the NSP aspects working in Thailand were differently significant in almost every aspect ($p\text{-value} < 0.10$), excepting the agricultural aspect ($p\text{-value} > 0.10$) ($p\text{-value} = 0.6393$). The Thai civil service sample participants had more acknowledgement about the NSP's aspects working in Thailand, and evaluated the NSP's aspects working well in Thailand, rather than the general perception toward excellent performance aspects of Taiwan. Thus, we could assume that the Taiwan's government succeeded in making an image of the island by implementing the NSP and working on the NSP's aspects in Thailand among the Thai civil service sample participants of the nine related agencies.

The K category civil service is important to the New Southbound Policy as they are commanded by the executive in doing the cooperation and relations implementations between Taiwan and Thailand according to the policy. In addition, they are prospects being promoted to be the managerial positions (M category) level and executive positions (S category) level in future. It will be good at the present and long-run if the Thai civil services have a good or positive image of Taiwan.

The survey completed 120 Thai civil service sample participants of K category (K1 – K5) in the nine related Thai government agencies to the New Southbound Policy which the policy having been introduced to Thailand since 2016. The participants had positive images of Taiwan in every aspect. The best image of Taiwan was technological advancement receiving a very positive score. The best performing areas were travel and tourism, and economic and trade, attracting very positive interests from the Thai civil service sample participants. They knew Taiwan for the first time from Taiwan's entertainment and fashion aspect. There was a very popular Taiwan's-pop wave during the millennium, the TV series of *Fantastic 4* (F4). At the present, Taiwan is one of the top travel destinations of Thai people. For the sample participants, the soft power of Taiwan was very attractive to Thai civil service.

In Taiwan relations with Thailand, the civil service sample participants evaluated the present relations between two authorities quite positively in both the unofficial relations and traditional relations. Also, among other Asian partners, Taiwan was considered positive as an important partner of Thailand by three reasons: Taiwan and Thailand having high volumes of trade, investment, export and import to each other; Taiwan having strong economic, finance, businesses being a potential trade partner of Thailand; and Thailand having firm relations with Taiwan due to huge number of Thai labors working in Taiwan and Taiwan being a place of jobs and working opportunities of Thai laborers. In addition, there was a potential that Taiwan would be more important to Thailand in the coming years due to Taiwan still being a place of Thai laborers going to work, one of the travel destinations of Thai tourists, and high values in trade, investment, export and import between Taiwan and Thailand.

Moreover, the civil service sample participants considered Taiwan being interested in Good Government and public administration and public service delivery. Taiwan could be studied as a case in both aspects. As for the New Southbound Policy evaluation, the policy was moderately known among the civil service sample participants (54.2% partially known of the policy). However, most of them agreed that Taiwan's government saw Thailand as a priority partner to the policy, and this policy would help to tighten relations between Thailand and Taiwan in the present and future. In their opinions, the NSP was working well in Thailand. Most aspects were positive. The three most excellent aspects were 1) travel and tourism; 2) social connectivity

and exchanges; and 3) economic, trade, business and commerce. Also, the participants recommended three areas that Taiwan and Thailand should be more cooperative: travel; economic and trade; and academics and education. These areas were good for Taiwan and Thailand due to Taiwan and Thailand having mutual benefits in economic and research; cooperation in academic and education being long investment for Taiwan into Thai society (Thai students receiving education from Taiwan's academic institutions in which Taiwan having expertise and reputation); and help boosting understanding, knowledge, and exchanges between Taiwan and Thailand.

The participants gave suggestions to tighten overall relations between Taiwan and Thailand in: continuing visa exemption measures, doing more cooperation between the public sector, and doing more civil service exchanges. These would help the image of Taiwan being rising and more impressive among Thai civil services. The participants also pointed out the prominent features of Taiwan and the people of Taiwan that they were liberal democratic, and having the freedom of speech; having good manners, etiquette, and behavior, as well as having good quality of life and good standard of living. The Taiwan's government could promote these prominent features as the distinction of Taiwan and the people of Taiwan in the international arena. Last but not least, among other superpower and middle power countries, Taiwan was positively ranked at the third place for favorite overall image in the civil service participants' eyes, even above superpower countries like the U.S., China, and Russia.

Finally, the Thai civil service sample participants stated that Taiwan had a strong and reputation in soft power. Taiwan could use this strength to do cooperations with the Thai public sector, and to promote a positive image of Taiwan in Thailand for the general public. Besides the tightening overall relations suggestions, the participants gave other suggestions that would be potential aspects in doing cooperation between Taiwan and Thailand being the fields of environment, disaster management, and industrial development. Taiwan had expertise and succeeded in bioeconomy, circular economy, and green economy (BCG); disaster management, prevention, and relief; and industrial development in semiconductors, electronics, digitalization, and agricultural industry. These successes were needed and welcomed to do cooperations with Thai public agencies. Also, for the general public, culture and education were the best channels to tighten relations between Taiwan and Thailand and to instill a positive image into

Thai people's mind. Promoting Taiwan's identities, especially, via Taiwan's foods and gastronomy, Taiwan's entertainment and fashion, giving funding and scholarships for Thai students, and organizing activity events both in Thailand and Taiwan would be a long investment and creating mutual benefit for Taiwan and Thailand. These cooperations and the use of Taiwan's soft power could be easily implemented under the New Southbound Policy framework at efficient cost but more effective outcomes in the relations between Taiwan and Thailand. Taiwan had gained success in pursuing a positive image from the Thai civil service according to the policy objectives.

Notes

- ¹ Lee and Chan (2023, 2) also gave more reasons that Taiwan moved to Southeast Asia. The Southeast Asian region is familiar to Taiwan, vice versa. The region and the island have trade, investment, supply chain, and people-to-people exchanges between each other. The region is a Taiwan investors' alternative production base in semiconductor, electronic components, printed circuits, high-end goods, cheap labor, and geographical proximity to Taiwan. Vietnam and Thailand are the two most beneficiaries from the NSP.
- ² The policy was the first initiative strengthening relations with Southeast Asian countries (Ku cited in Lee and Chan, 2023, 11).
- ³ The function of the association is not only business, the foundation stone for Taiwan-Thailand relations as well.
- ⁴ For instance: cabinet members, government advisors, Prime Minister advisors, Ministerial advisors, senior advisors, Senators, Presidents of independent constitutional organs, even Privy Councilors.
- ⁵ Q.4 Please rate the excellent performance aspects of Taiwan.
- ⁶ Q.15 In the following aspects, do you think the NSP is working well in the relations between Taiwan and Thailand?
- ⁷ T-Test in Stata (90% Conf. Interval). N=120.

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China's Investment and Trade in Bangladesh: Local Realities and Global Implications

Kamrul *Hasan*[°] and Guanie *Lim*^{*}

Abstract

In the wake of its burgeoning outward foreign direct investment (FDI) and export activities over the past decades, China's presence in the global economy has attracted considerable attention. This discussion is witnessed just as much in Bangladesh, the main subject of this paper. Especially after the 2013 launch of the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Chinese economic footprint has noticeably increased in the South Asian country. Yet, this development has thus far not been analyzed in detail. To shed light on the matter, this paper provides a detailed, longitudinal study of two important metrics: FDI and trade. It also contextualizes China's economic performance in relation to those of US, India and Japan. The paper finds that, although Chinese FDI entering Bangladesh is increasing, FDIs from the other three countries are also proliferating. More importantly, US FDI inflow and stock position remain far ahead of those of China, India and Japan. When it comes to trade, Bangladesh enjoys trade surplus only with the US, suffering deficit with the rest of the countries. Overall, China's FDI and trade linkages in Bangladesh, despite their fairly rapid growth, are still relatively modest.

Keywords: *Bangladesh, China, South Asia, Foreign Direct Investment, International Trade, Political Economy.*

[°] Associate Professor, Department of Government and Politics, Jahangirnagar University, Savar, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

^{*} Associate Professor, National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies, Tokyo, Japan.

1. Introduction

China's economic rise, since it became a World Trade Organization (WTO) member in December 2001, has been nothing short of miraculous (Grosse et al., 2021; Nolan, 2013; Xing, 2021). In 2010, it even overtook Japan to become the world's second-largest economy. Given its economic gravity, China's export and outward foreign direct investment (FDI) has been the subject of intense debate (Breslin, 2013; Hang, 2017; Jenkins, 2019; Shiffrin, 2018). This is especially so since 2013, when the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) – an ambitious program to more meaningfully connect Europe and Asia – was announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping. However, the discussion has not always been conducted rationally, with fear and impartiality driving much of the dialogue (Lim, 2019).

While such apprehension has existed for some time, it arguably boiled over during the tenure of US President Donald Trump (2017-2021). His administration foisted a series of sanctions on the Chinese economy, citing reasons ranging from national security, industry injury, technology theft, to unfair trading practices (see Di, Luft, and Zhong 2019; Wei 2019). The Joe Biden administration, taking over from Trump in early 2021, has broadly persisted with these foreign policies (Johnson, 2022). Like-minded European nations have seemingly followed suit. For example, the UK government declared in late 2020 that it would ban Huawei – one of China's most technology-intensive companies – from competing in the provision of its 5G network infrastructure. It justified such a move as a direct response to US sanctions targeting the firm (Perrigo, 2020).

In the Global South, Chinese investment and trade have not been entirely insulated from such skepticism either. Initial warmth soon gave way to project-related concerns as well as old, if unspoken, fears that China is “buying the world” through a spate of “debt trap diplomacy” (see Camba 2022; Lim 2019). During the Indonesian Presidential election of April 2019, the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Rail project, arguably the most well-known BRI project in the Southeast Asian nation, was singled out for its alleged threat in channeling China's Communist ideology to Indonesia, thereby impacting its strategic autonomy (Liu & Lim, 2023). A similar dynamic is observed in South Asia. During the Munich Security Conference of 2022, taking part in a panel discussion, Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar supposedly warned Bangladesh about the potential negative externalities of some Chinese investment, urging a

“rethink about impractical projects” (Haidar, 2022). This comment did not go down well with Bangladeshi Foreign Minister Abul Kalam Abdul Momen, who rejected claims about a Chinese “debt trap”. His comments were echoed by Li Jiming, the Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh (Daily Star, 2022).

Regardless of the public brickbat, one cannot ignore the growing presence of Chinese FDI and trade in the Bangladeshi economy. Between 2011 to 2021, FDI inflow from China has proliferated, making it one of Bangladesh's foremost investors. Flourishing bilateral trade has also seen China solidify its position as the South Asian nation's top trading partner, outcompeting traditional players such as the US and India (Anwar, 2022). Such economic heft has received varied response across different segments of society. While some laud the growing opportunities, fears and doubts have been voiced regarding China's supposed economic domination. One of the most circulated involves the aforementioned “debt trap diplomacy”. While such allegations have been debunked in more rigorous studies (see, for example, (Brautigam, 2020; Jones & Hameiri, 2020; Singh, 2020), they continue to resonate widely among the general populace. Parallel to these allegations are concerns about Dhaka's overdependence on Chinese FDI to propel growth. Some commentators claim that too much Chinese investment might crowd out investors from other nations (Ahmed, 2019). Another concern is Bangladesh's gaping trade imbalance with China (Anwar 2022). Bangladeshi export to China is far behind its import from the latter, resulting in a trade deficit ratio of about 1:20. Although China grants duty-free access to 97% of Bangladeshi products, Bangladeshi firms have found it challenging to increase their market share in the Chinese market (Parvez, 2023). In contrast, Chinese products have gained a large following in Bangladesh since China gained WTO membership in the early 2000s. Chinese import has grown even further since the BRI was announced in 2013.

With the above as a backdrop, this paper seeks to add depth to the issue at hand by addressing the following research questions: How are Chinese FDI and trade actually taking shape in the Bangladeshi economy in relation to its traditional partners i.e. the US, India and Japan? Should Bangladesh fear Chinese FDI and trade then? In so doing, this paper investigates FDI and trade data over an extended period, going beyond what popular rhetoric suggests. To present a more nuanced and fine-grained perspective, the paper also contextualizes China's economic performance vis-à-vis Bangladesh's

traditional partners i.e. the US, India and Japan. Much of the statistical information is retrieved from the Bangladesh Bank, the country's central bank. This paper mainly draws upon statistical figures for the last five to 10 years, although older data has also proven useful. To increase the robustness and consistency of data, reports published by international agencies, government documents, and newspaper essays were also studied.

Several arguments are made here. Firstly, Chinese firms have most certainly grown their market share in Bangladesh, but so too have their counterparts from the three other economies. Related to this is the predominance of US FDI compared to Chinese, Indian, and Japanese FDI. Secondly, Bangladesh enjoys trade surplus only with the US, recording deficit against the other three economies. More interestingly, trade deficit incurred against China has outstripped that of India, South Asia's traditional hegemon. If there was a risk of trade dependency or other types of vulnerabilities, then Bangladesh is likely to have erred on the side of caution by "spreading" it across multiple countries (e.g. China) rather than "concentrating" it in the hands of a regional hegemon. The overall prognosis is that Chinese FDI and trade performance in Bangladesh is considerably less sensational than what rhetoric tends to suggest. The fundamental reality, which often goes unmentioned, is China's status as a latecomer to the South Asian as well as international economy. In addition to their lack of operational experience across borders, Chinese firms also must displace the entrenched presence of better resourced firms (such as the US and India). This "incumbency effect" is likely to hold sway, at least for the foreseeable future.

The paper begins by critiquing the existing literature. Subsequently, Section 3 studies FDI entering Bangladesh from the US, China, India and Japan. Both the *flow* and *stock* of FDI, representing the short-term and long-term business dynamics, will be examined. Section 4 focuses on Bangladesh's trade performance vis-à-vis its four economic partners. Section 5 discusses the findings, with the objective of cross-fertilizing the scholarship on FDI and trade. The paper concludes with a summary of the main argument and suggests some avenues for future research.

2. A Review of China's Investment and Trade

Much has been written about how China's investment and trade patterns are remolding the regional and global political economic architecture. The implicit understanding driving much of the scholarship, especially popular

in international political economy and related disciplines, hinges on the extent to which China can be incorporated into a US-dominated international system (see, for example, Ji 2022; Rana and Pacheco Pardo 2018). Within this broad umbrella, two strands of opinion can be discerned. Scholars within the first strand argue that China's rapid growth has generated pressure on other economies, both advanced and developing. This imbalance, if poorly managed, is likely to destabilize Western/Japanese institutions and the preexisting political economic order (Naim, 2007; Shiffrinson, 2018). There is also belief that China's economic rise is linked to its military and political motive. For example, Shiffrinson (2018) views China's rise as a clear-cut challenge to American interest. One of his main policy prescriptions is to deploy military capacity to keep China's expansion in check, while strategically cooperating with the Chinese on other issues of global importance.

Analysts within the first group particularly harp on investment from Chinese transnational corporations (TNCs), singling it out for critique. According to Godement et al (2011), Chinese TNCs are exploiting the open European economy, capturing market share in public procurement, stockpiling government bonds, and buying up valued European companies, resulting in a "scramble for Europe". They further argue that the largesse offered by Chinese TNCs are increasingly splitting the continent into two blocs: "frustrated market-openers" and "cash-strapped deal-seekers" (p.7). This sentiment arguably fueled Italy's decision to distance itself from the BRI in mid-2023. The southern European nation seemingly was under the impression that closer Chinese relations would help fulfil its investment needs to jumpstart its ailing economy. However, since signing up to the BRI in 2019, Chinese investment in other European markets has far outstripped its investments in Italy (Sacks, 2023).

On the contrary, several scholars have challenged the above view. They argue that even in spite of China's rapid expansion of export and outward FDI in the global economy, it is unlikely for it to significantly change the existing political economic order, at least within the short to medium term. In particular, trade economists stress the need to scrutinize global value chains (GVCs), rather than traditional trade metrics. Kam (2017), for example, argues that conventional trade measurement records only products crossing national boundaries in gross values. This classification implies that economies which specialize in assembling goods (e.g. China and several

Asian countries) might record rather high trade figures, but contribute only modest amounts of value-added. To this can be added Xing (2021), who explains that modern trade has increasingly shifted from trade of finished goods into that of specialized tasks. This phenomenon is in turn driven by international TNCs that expanded into China after its economy liberalized in 1978. Through the example of the iPhone, Xing demonstrates that while it is “made/assembled in China”, much of the product’s value-added came from critical components and services such as memory chip and branding. These are almost exclusively the domain of TNCs from advanced economies, meaning that value-added contributed by Chinese firms are considerably smaller than what the headlines usually suggest.

Tangential but important to the GVC discussion is the notion that China is “buying the world”. For Nolan (2013), Western/Japanese TNCs have been at the forefront of global merger and acquisition for at least a few decades before China’s rather recent “Going Out”. These firms have also long invested into China, thereby giving them substantial influence in dictating the resultant GVCs. As a result, Chinese export of high-technology, branded goods have been largely driven by such global lead firms. While China has certainly tried to groom its own cohort of “national champions”, teething success can only be found in highly regulated, non-tradable industries such as utility, infrastructure, and trade (Nolan, 2014).

Chinese corporate weakness is highlighted even more when its national firms venture abroad. In its “near abroad” that is Southeast Asia, Tong (2021) shows that Chinese FDI has generally not been able to usurp more established investors such as those from the Global North. Notwithstanding some high-profile projects like the Jakarta-Bandung High Speed Rail, Chinese firms can only be considered a significant source of FDI in Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar, three lower middle income regional states which liberalized their once centrally planned economies relatively late. In a similar vein, Lim (2019) argues that Chinese FDI entering Southeast Asia has been driven largely by tertiary sector business activities such as real estate development and wholesale and retail trade. Unlike manufacturing driven by the other Global North economies, these tertiary activities are unlikely to stimulate upgrading and foster linkages because they offer little positive spillover to the local stakeholders. While there are indeed highly skilled services, the reality is that services, relative to manufacturing, tend not to be very dynamic and internationally tradable. In addition, their scale

is often modest, meaning that labor cannot be absorbed sufficiently, at least compared to manufacturing (Rodrik, 2015).

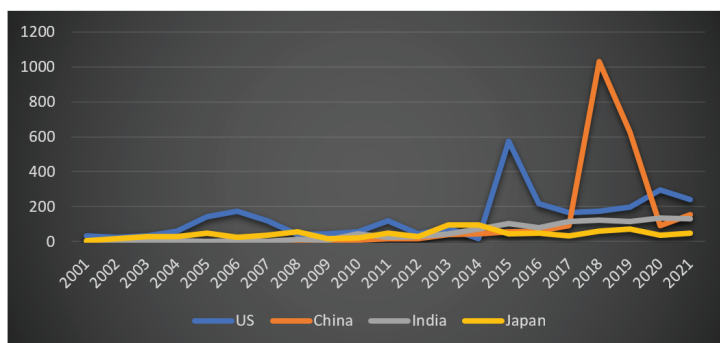
Additionally, Chinese firms' relative weakness in the secondary sector (i.e. manufacturing) means that they are unable to compete with better-known (Western/Japanese) players that have long established their operations in Southeast Asia. Common examples include the automobile and consumer electronic industries (Harwit, 2013; Ngo, 2017). This paper fosters dialogue with such research, providing empirical evidence to analyze the manifestations of Chinese FDI and trade in Bangladesh. Of particular significance is its illumination of Chinese performance in comparison to that of the US, India and Japan.

3. Foreign Direct Investment Analysis of Bangladesh

3.1. Country-by-Country Foreign Direct Investment Distribution, 2001-2021

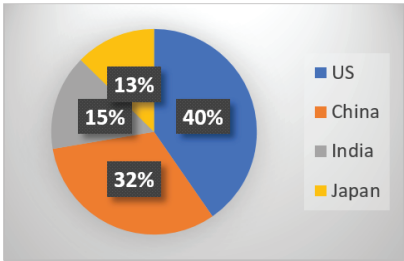
Figure 1 shows the flow of FDI by the US, China, India and Japan into Bangladesh from 2001 to 2021. FDI inflow from all four countries has been increasing steadily for most of the period, barring a sudden rise and decline from the US and China in 2015 and 2018 respectively. Chinese FDI has not grown significantly for much of the period. It is only after 2010 that Chinese FDI becomes comparable vis-à-vis FDI from the other three countries. Figure 2 shows that the FDI inflow from the US is always bigger compared to China, India and Japan over the period analyzed. More accurately, it amounted to 40% of the total FDI contributed by the four countries.

Figure 1. Foreign Direct Investment Inflow from the US, China, India and Japan, 2001-2021 (Million US\$)



Source: Bangladesh Bank

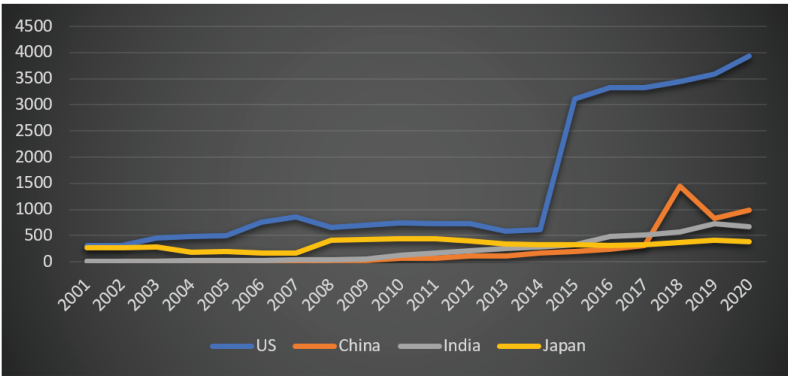
Figure 2. Foreign Direct Investment Inflow from the US, China, India and Japan, 2001-2021 (%)



Source: Bangladesh Bank

Figure 3 shows that Chinese FDI stock position has been rather minuscule during the first decade of the period analyzed, but it began to grow from US\$62.3 million in 2010 to close to US\$1 billion in 2020. In addition, the value of Chinese FDI stock was smaller than that of other three investors until 2017, after which it climbed above those of India and Japan. One of the primary factors contributing to China's comparatively modest FDI stock is its status as a latecomer economy. Perhaps more interestingly, the US remains the most important player in terms of FDI stock. It far outweighs the other three economies analyzed here.

Figure 3. Foreign Direct Investment Stock Position of the US, China, India and Japan 2001-2020 (Million US\$)



Source: Bangladesh Bank

3.2. Sector-by-Sector Foreign Direct Investment Distribution, 2011-2021

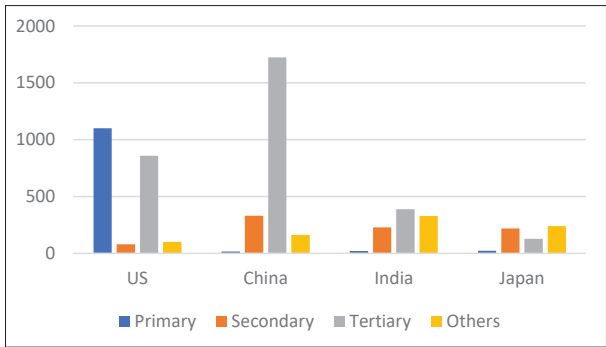
Table 1 depicts a sectoral (primary, secondary, tertiary and others) overview of FDI inflow from the US, China, India and Japan between 2011 and 2021. Relative to China, India and Japan, the US is an anomaly because of its strong focus on the primary sector (see Figure 4). Additionally, US FDI entering the secondary sector is noticeably muted, unlike the other three economies. All four FDI providers display a noticeable preference towards tertiary activities. For China, tertiary FDI has been especially huge, although this outperformance seems to be a one-off event and shall be contextualized in the subsequent paragraphs.

Table 1: Sector-By-Sector Foreign Direct Investment Inflow, 2011-2021
(Million US\$)

Country	Sectors	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
US	Primary	98.46	13.6	5.1	0.01	320.87	138.56	95.86	90.73	99.99	99.31	137
	Secondary	1.94	3.46	6.32	9.36	6.27	6.56	6.49	8.07	7.89	11.52	12.29
	Tertiary	14.25	23.36	47.97	18.53	236.66	64	59.61	61.81	82.21	170.46	78.82
	Others	3.09	3.38	16.56	5.77	9.97	8.62	4.69	13.64	7.43	15.06	12.09
	Total	117.74	43.8	75.95	33.67	573.77	217.74	166.66	174.25	197.52	296.35	240.20
China	Primary	0	3.35	10.97	1.55	0	0.02	0	0.06	0.05	0.04	0.04
	Secondary	14.7	11.72	24.04	33.77	43.52	20.33	40.55	41.05	36.28	28.4	36.5
	Tertiary	0.16	0.19	0.33	1.47	1.66	5.84	14.19	970.37	572.74	49.47	106.85
	Others	3.79	2.53	4.64	6.27	11.61	35.21	35.38	18.42	16.85	13.43	12.11
	Total	18.65	17.89	39.98	43.06	56.79	61.40	90.12	1029.90	625.92	91.34	155.50
India	Primary	0	1.97	0.72	0.34	2.21	2.55	1.81	5.1	1.52	0.29	2.59
	Secondary	14.67	9.11	21.09	21.01	28.89	23.04	22.5	22.77	17.86	21.41	26.19
	Tertiary	7.93	10.25	8.78	24.64	40.61	28	59.57	46.67	47.2	62.51	50.46
	Others	3.14	7.1	9.42	21.83	30.99	25.61	30.77	46.92	49.41	50.38	51.93
	Total	25.74	28.43	45.01	67.82	102.70	79.20	114.65	121.46	115.99	134.59	131.17
Japan	Primary	0.01	0.92	0.22	0	0.31	0	0.27	-4.38	11.91	6.1	6.49
	Secondary	40.44	17.54	19.14	25.54	26.13	9.32	6.31	18.85	20.04	13.79	21.7
	Tertiary	0.01	6.11	34.13	12.37	9.6	10	13.53	20.5	8.64	5.49	7.2
	Others	6.09	5.51	40.88	57.80	9.33	28.94	10.82	23.43	31.74	9.68	14.48
	Total	46.55	30.08	94.37	95.71	45.37	48.26	30.93	58.40	72.33	35.06	49.87

Source: Bangladesh Bank

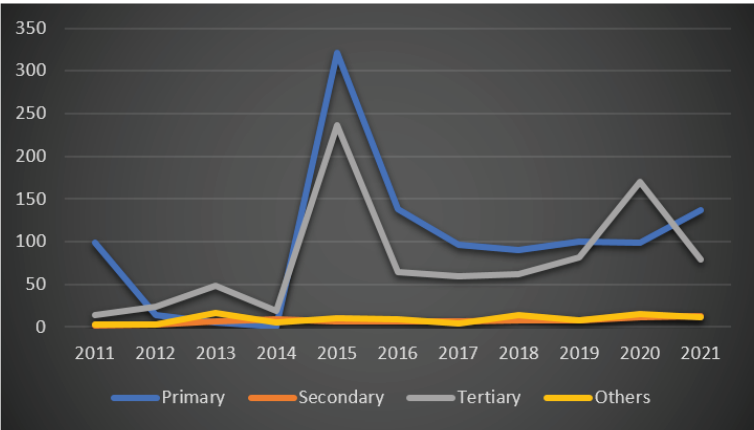
Figure 4. Snapshot of Sector-by-Sector Foreign Direct Investment Inflow, 2011-2021 (Million US\$)



Source: Bangladesh Bank

US TNCs have largely invested in primary and tertiary activities between 2011 and 2021 (see Figure 5 and Table 2). In particular, US investors channeled over 50% of their FDI towards the primary sector. Much of this largesse went towards mining (gas and petroleum) businesses. For tertiary industries, US FDI has largely financed power, insurance and banking.

Figure 5. Sector-by-Sector US Foreign Direct Inflow, 2011-2021 (Million US\$)



Source: Bangladesh Bank

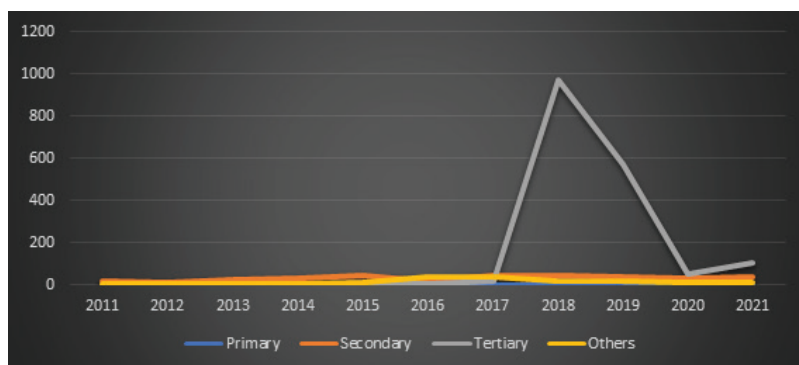
**Table 2. Detailed Breakdown of US Foreign Direct Investment Inflow, 2011-2021
(Million US\$)**

Sectors	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Primary											
Agriculture & Fishing		0.15	0.17	0.01	-	0.14	0.63	0.28	0.21	0.17	0.37
Mining (Gas & Petroleum)	98.46	13.45	4.93		320.87	138.42	95.23	90.45	99.78	99.14	136.63
Sub-Total	98.46	13.6	5.1	0.01	320.87	138.56	95.86	90.73	99.99	99.31	137
Secondary											
Textile & wearing	1.94	2.53	5.05	8.74	5.70	6.40	6.37	7.91	6.68	10.74	11.70
Food		0.18	0.06	0.37	0.59	0.16	0.01	0.15	1.23	0.74	0.48
Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals		0.75	1.21	0.25	-0.02	-	0.11	0.01	-	-	0.08
Metal & Machinery products				0.00					-0.04		
Leather & Leather Products				0.00	-	-		-	0.02	0.04	0.03
Cement				0.00	-	-	-		-		-
Vehicle and Transport Equipment					-						
Sub-Total	1.94	3.46	6.32	9.36	6.27	6.56	6.49	8.07	7.89	11.52	12.29
Tertiary											
Banking	8.96	14.92	45.84	12.95	14.23	1.99	18.05	18.78	18.22	17.22	10.24
Telecommunication	1.15	0.48	0.55	0.93	0.32	0.29	0.15	0.05	-0.05	-0.01	0.03
Construction				0.27		0.69	0.59	0.03	-	-	
Trading			0.11	1.00	0.37	3.64	1.79	14.06	14.93	13.76	24.98
NBFI		0.24		1.43				0.12			
Computer Software & It		0.59	1.33	1.38	1.62	1.49	3.73	11.99	17.66	3.86	5.05
Insurance	4.12	7.08			21.46	26.52	35.09	27.48	32.67	38.15	35.71
Power	0.02	0.05	0.14	0.57	198.66	29.38	0.21	-10.70	-1.22	97.48	2.81
Sub-Total	14.25	23.36	47.97	18.53	236.66	64	59.61	61.81	82.21	170.46	78.82
Others	3.09	3.38	16.56	5.77	9.97	8.62	4.69	13.64	7.43	15.06	12.09
Total	117.74	43.8	75.95	33.67	573.77	217.74	166.66	174.25	197.52	296.35	240.20

Source: Bangladesh Bank

For the Chinese TNCs, the sectoral distribution has been generally even between 2011 and 2021 (see Figure 6 and Table 3). However, there were two huge spikes in FDI entering the tertiary sector in 2018 and 2019. This drastic increase is likely linked to big-ticket infrastructure projects such as Payra Powerplant, Padma Rail Link, and Karnaphuli Tunnel. Virtually all of these are considered BRI projects. If the large jump in tertiary sector FDI for 2018 and 2019 were isolated, the overall picture would change rather drastically. In other words, a significant portion of Chinese FDI would have flown towards the secondary sector.

Figure 6. Sector-by-Sector Chinese Foreign Direct Investment Inflow, 2011-2021 (Million US\$)



Source: Bangladesh Bank

Table 3. Detailed Breakdown of Chinese Foreign Direct Investment Inflow, 2011-2021 (Million US\$)

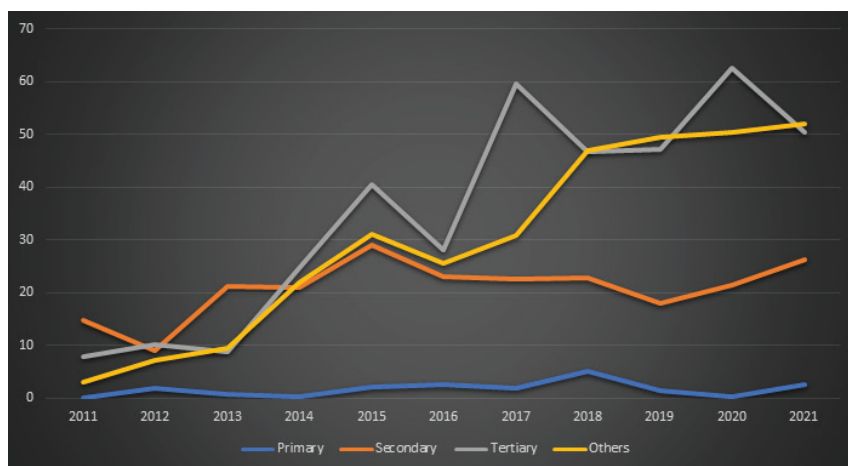
Sector	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Primary											
Agriculture & Fishing		3.35	10.97	1.55	-	0.02	-	0.06	0.05	0.04	0.04
Mining (gas & petroleum)					-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sub-Total	0	3.35	10.97	1.55	0	0.02	0	0.06	0.05	0.04	0.04
Secondary											
Textile & wearing	14.69	11.53	21.38	29.40	37.11	16.46	38.07	39.56	29.94	25.19	36.24
Food				0.60	-	-	-0.10	0.03	0.97	0.76	0.64
Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals				0.02	0.63	-0.83	0.04	0.04	3.72	-0.01	0.07

Sector	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Metal & Machinery products				0.29					0.09	-	
Leather & Leather Products	0.01	0.19	2.65	3.46	5.78	4.70	2.54	1.42	1.56	2.46	-0.45
Cement				0.00	-	-	-				-
Vehicle and Transport Equipment			0.01		-						
Sub-Total	14.7	11.72	24.04	33.77	43.52	20.33	40.55	41.05	36.28	28.4	36.5
Tertiary											
Banking				0.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Telecommunication				0.00	-	-	-	-0.12	-	-	-
Construction				0.35		0.10	3.36	8.62	4.83	4.62	5.34
Trading		0.19		0.43	1.41	5.33	9.96	14.67	5.65	3.27	3.11
NBFI				0.00				113.07			
Computer Software & It			0.06	0.00	-	-	0.34	-	0.20	-	-
Insurance					-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Power	0.16		0.27	0.69	0.25	0.41	0.53	834.13	562.06	41.58	98.40
Sub-Total	0.16	0.19	0.33	1.47	1.66	5.84	14.19	970.37	572.74	49.47	106.85
Others	3.79	2.53	4.64	6.27	11.61	35.21	35.38	18.42	16.85	13.43	12.11
Total	18.65	17.89	39.98	43.06	56.79	61.40	90.12	1029.90	625.92	91.34	155.50

Source: Bangladesh Bank

Despite some fluctuation, India has invested predominately in tertiary and other industries (see Figure 7 and Table 4). Key tertiary activities include banking, power, and trading. Although not as significant as tertiary and other industries, the secondary (manufacturing) sector still accounted for a fairly sizeable portion of Indian FDI. Much of this secondary sector FDI (nearly 90%) has been financed by three specific undertakings: textile and wearing, chemicals and pharmaceuticals. Overall, Indian FDI seems to resemble that of Japan, which will be discussed next.

**Figure 7. Sector-by-Sector Indian Foreign Direct Investment Inflow, 2011-2021
(Million US\$)**



Source: Bangladesh Bank

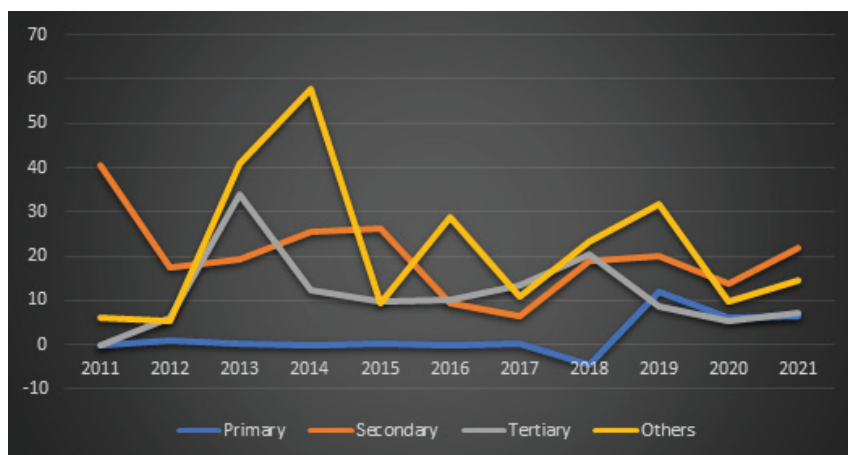
**Table 4. Detailed Breakdown of Indian Foreign Direct Investment Inflow,
2011-2021 (Million US\$)**

Sector	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Primary											
Agriculture & Fishing		1.97	0.72	0.34	2.21	2.55	1.66	1.40	1.52	0.54	2.74
Mining (Gas & Petroleum)					-	-	0.15	3.70	-	-0.25	-0.15
Sub-Total	0	1.97	0.72	0.34	2.21	2.55	1.81	5.1	1.52	0.29	2.59
Secondary											
Textile & wearing	12.23	6.54	16.94	9.12	20.36	17.42	14.73	14.65	10.76	10.69	15.92
Food	0.72	1.66	0.95	1.54	2.75	2.25	2.62	0.52	2.71	1.29	1.32
Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals	1.67	0.91	1.89	10.22	3.02	3.32	5.15	6.08	6.38	7.26	6.72
Metal & Machinery Products	0.05			0.06					-2.74		
Leather & Leather Products			1.31	0.07	0.06	0.05	-	1.52	0.75	0.85	0.91
Cement				0.00	-	-	-			1.32	1.32
Vehicle and Transport Equipment					2.70						
Sub-Total	14.67	9.11	21.09	21.01	28.89	23.04	22.5	22.77	17.86	21.41	26.19

Sector	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Tertiary											
Banking	7.86	9.8	7.99	16.83	23.71	10.99	34.34	12.67	12.09	13.05	10.20
Telecommunication		0.02	0.01	0.49	0.18	0.19	4.52	14.91	5.05	2.27	-
Construction				0.00		-	0.04	0.08	0.01	-	-0.72
Trading		0.19	0.77	6.24	3.96	5.90	6.74	3.93	8.04	6.36	5.75
NBFI		0.24		1.03				-			
Computer Software & It			0.01	0.05	0.27	1.21	3.83	0.98	1.26	0.58	0.06
Insurance					6.38	-0.25	0.24	0.37	0.47	0.45	0.70
Power	0.07			0.00	6.11	9.96	9.86	13.73	20.28	39.80	34.47
Sub-Total	7.93	10.25	8.78	24.64	40.61	28	59.57	46.67	47.2	62.51	50.46
Others	3.14	7.1	9.42	21.83	30.99	25.61	30.77	46.92	49.41	50.38	51.93
Total	25.74	28.43	45.01	67.82	102.70	79.20	114.65	121.46	115.99	134.59	131.17

Source: Bangladesh Bank

Japanese FDI in all the sectors, except primary sector, has been generally trending downward (see Figure 8 and Table 5). Much like Indian FDI, Japanese FDI has largely financed the tertiary and other sectors. Although manufacturing FDI occasionally occupied the top spot in certain years, it has – on balance – trailed those of the tertiary and other sectors. This is a rather surprising observation as Japan has groomed some of the world's most sophisticated manufacturers, many of whom have found it advantageous to locate their labor-intensive operations to developing countries with a lower input cost. On the other hand, primary sector investment has been kept at a relatively low level, but it did show a modest step-up since 2018.

Figure 8. Sector-by-Sector Japanese Foreign Direct Investment Inflow, 2011-2021 (Million US\$)

Source: Bangladesh Bank

Table 5. Detailed Breakdown of Japanese Foreign Direct Investment Inflow, 2011-2021 (Million US\$)

Sector	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Primary											
Agriculture & Fishing	0.01	0.92	0.22	0.00	0.31	-	0.27	-5.50	-0.09	0.02	0.22
Mining (Gas & Petroleum)					-	-	-	1.12	12.00	6.08	6.27
Sub-Total	0.01	0.92	0.22	0	0.31	0	0.27	-4.38	11.91	6.1	6.49
Secondary											
Textile & wearing	31.28	12.17	13.05	3.06	4.50	3.99	1.38	3.64	3.62	1.36	2.62
Food		0.78	0.11	0.32	0.27	1.19	-	-0.06	2.00	1.45	1.31
Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals	9.04	4.35	5.9	18.82	19.04	3.55	4.08	14.83	12.88	10.46	16.72
Metal & Machinery Products				0.71					0.80		
Leather & Leather Products	0.12	0.24	0.08	2.63	2.31	0.59	0.85	0.44	0.74	0.52	1.05
Cement				0.00	-	-	-			-	-
Vehicle and Transport Equipment					0.01						
Sub-Total	40.44	17.54	19.14	25.54	26.13	9.32	6.31	18.85	20.04	13.79	21.7

Sector	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Tertiary											
Banking			1.27	0.00	0.21	0.13	0.21	0.35	0.56	0.34	0.59
Telecommunication	0.01	5.04	10.09	4.76	2.47	0.90	1.17	3.75	1.27	0.57	-
Construction				0.15		2.32	4.33	12.10	1.67	1.62	2.09
Trading		0.64	0.71	3.13	2.03	2.46	4.52	1.93	2.33	0.39	0.97
NBFI				0.00							
Computer Software & It		0.43	0.65	0.26	0.29	0.18	0.45	0.43	0.59	0.52	0.82
Insurance					-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Power			21.41	4.07	4.60	4.01	2.85	1.94	2.22	2.05	2.73
Sub-Total	0.01	6.11	34.13	12.37	9.6	10	13.53	20.5	8.64	5.49	7.2
Others	6.09	5.51	40.88	57.80	9.33	28.94	10.82	23.43	31.74	9.68	14.48
Total	46.55	30.08	94.37	95.71	45.37	48.26	30.93	58.40	72.33	35.06	49.87

Source: Bangladesh Bank

4. Trade Analysis of Bangladesh

4.1. Overall Import Performance, 2011-2020

Overall, Bangladesh's import from China and India has grown steadily from 2011 to 2020 (see Figure 9). Chinese import, in particular, more than doubled from a little over US\$6 billion in 2011 to about US\$13 billion in 2020. Indian import, while not as impressive as that of Chinese import, still saw a heavy expansion over the same period. By contrast, the value of imported goods from the US and Japan has been overshadowed by those of China and India. Figure 10 presents Bangladesh's import market share from another perspective. China alone accounts for more than 50% of the entire market, with India occupying the second spot with a 34% share. Japan and the US collectively command only a modest 14% of the market. For additional context, the aggregate weight of these two economies is only about one-fourth of that controlled by China.

Figure 9. Import of Goods and Services from the US, China, India and Japan, 2011-2020 (Million US\$)

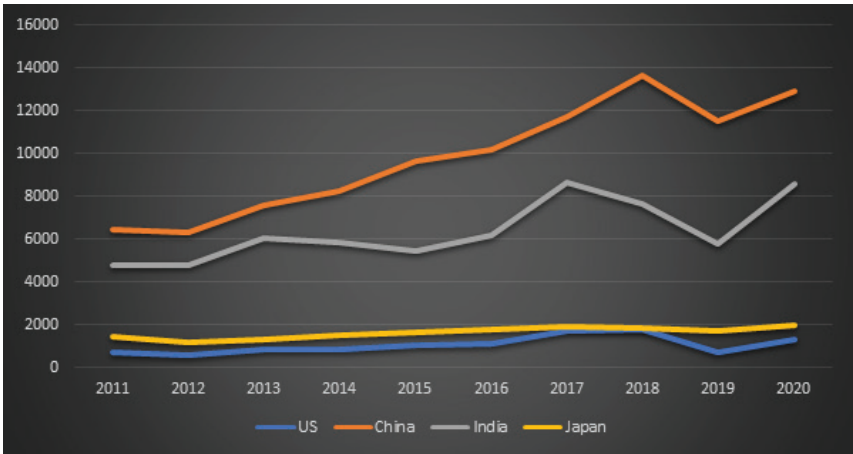
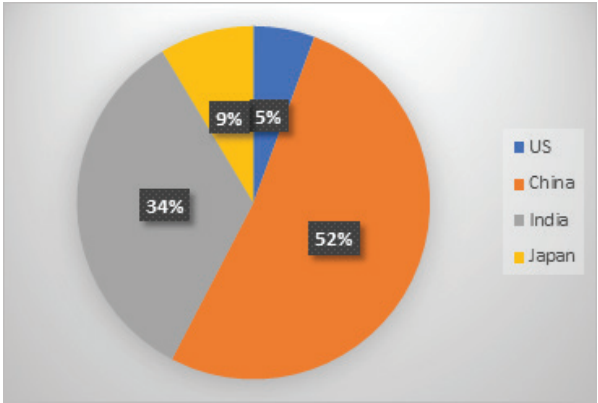


Figure 10. Import of Goods and Services from the US, China, India and Japan, 2011-2020 (%)



Source: Bangladesh Bank

4.1.1. Sector-by-Sector Import Performance, 2011-2021

Bangladesh, because of its developing nation status, is bound to import a substantial amount of secondary (manufactured) goods from more developed nations. Such trade dependence is reflected in Table 6 and Figure 11. Its dependence on Chinese secondary goods is most obvious, followed by those originating from India, Japan, and the US.

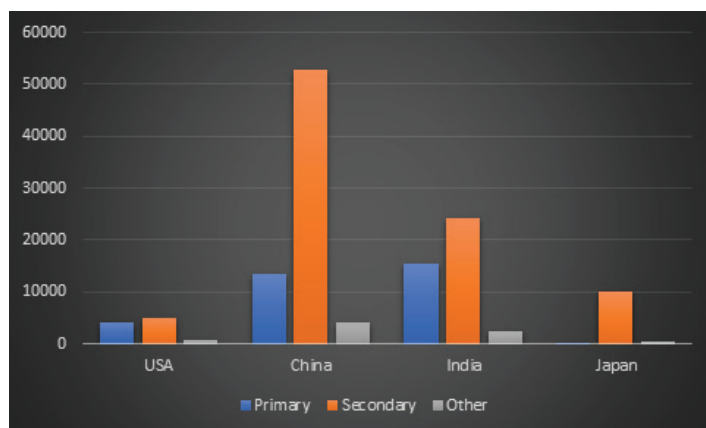
Import of primary goods, the second-most popular sector, clearly lags that of secondary goods. Perhaps unsurprisingly, import of Japanese primary sector goods has been very insignificant, owing to Japan's low endowment of natural resource.

Table 6. Sector-by-Sector Import from the US, China, India and Japan, 2015-2020 (Million US\$)

Country	Sector	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
US	Primary	355.7	536.6	715.8	761.3	888.7	1003.6	4261.7
	Secondary	561.8	507.7	831.8	881	1107.2	1140.8	5030.3
	Other	90.1	86.3	157.1	134.4	130.2	123.8	721.9
China	Primary	2139.9	2200.8	2514.5	2444.1	2086	1989.1	13374.4
	Secondary	6738.7	7208.3	8645.2	10781.8	8832.7	10486.9	52694
	Other	1179.5	1031.8	532.6	413	571.1	449.3	4177.3
India	Primary	2204.1	2398.8	2697	2617.4	2174.9	3231.7	15323.9
	Secondary	2849.3	3351.2	5415.22	4525.97	3170.2	4817.5	24129.39
	Other	386.0	393.9	427.1	412.2	368.2	432.7	2420.1
Japan	Primary	11.6	12.9	16.4	24.2	30.3	26.3	121.7
	Secondary	1518.1	1629	1770.5	1754.9	1603.6	1915	10191.1
	Other	113.9	93.3	82.7	67.2	86.8	59.9	503.8

Source: Bangladesh Bank

Figure 11. Snapshot of Sector-by-Sector Import from the US, China, India and Japan, 2015-2020 (Million US\$)

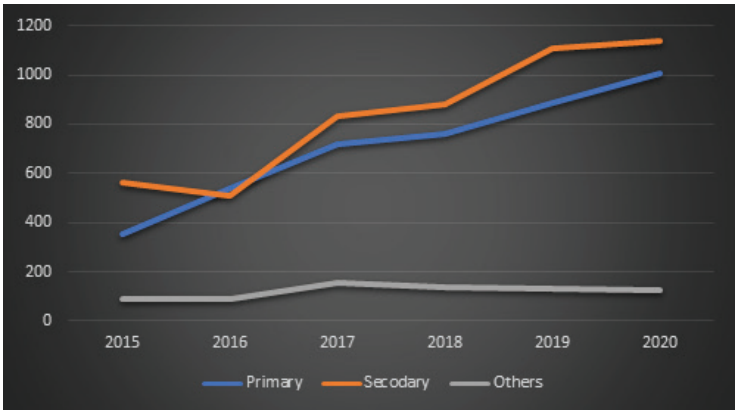


Source: Bangladesh Bank

4.1.1.1. Import from the US

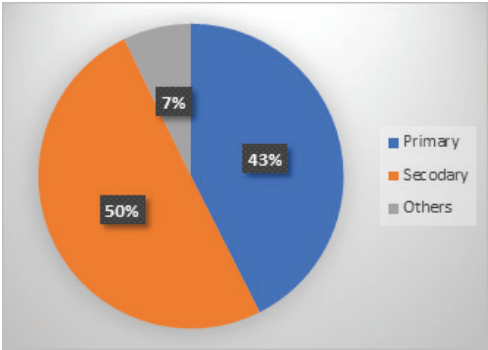
Figure 12 shows that import of primary and secondary products from the US has generally grown. The import value of both sectors has also kept pace with each other throughout the period analyzed. As a result, goods from both the primary and secondary sector command about 93% of the import market share (see Figure 13). Their robust performance stands in stark contrast to the import value of the other sector, be it in absolute value or growth rate.

Figure 12. Sector-by-Sector Import from the US, 2015-2020 (Million US\$)



Source: Bangladesh Bank

Figure 13. Sector-by-Sector Import from the US, 2015-2020 (%)



Source: Bangladesh Bank

A closer examination reveals that, for primary goods, Bangladesh mainly imports seeds, grains, and plants, contributing close to 55% of the value of total primary goods brought in (see Table 7). This is followed by cotton, which takes up about another 40% of the pie.

As for secondary items, electric and electronics machinery, and metal products are the two most valuable products imported from the US. They collectively cover more than 60% of the value of secondary goods imported.

Table 7. Detailed Breakdown of Import from the US, 2015-2020 (Million US\$)

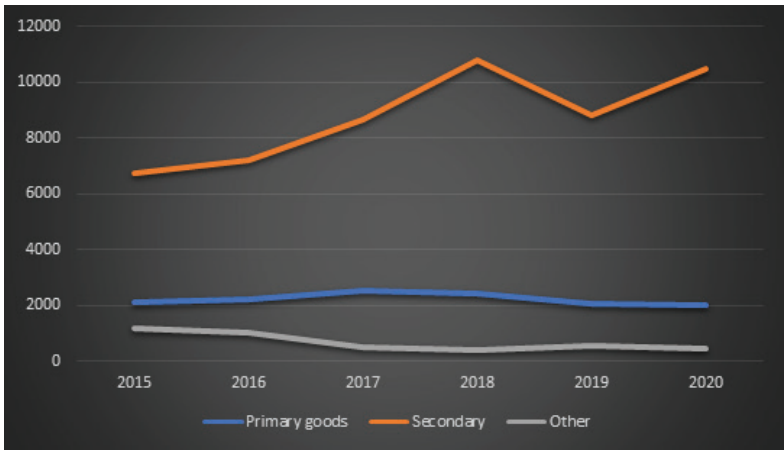
Sector	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Primary goods							
- Cotton	88.7	224.6	310.7	368.0	387.1	314.1	1693.2
- Mineral fuels & Oil			21.4	27.5	53.2	159.0	261.1
- Fruits							
- Vegetables							
- Seeds, grains & plants	267.0	312.0	383.7	365.8	448.4	530.5	2307.4
- Coffee, tea & spices							
- Salt, Sulphur...							
Sub Total	355.7	536.6	715.8	761.3	888.7	1003.6	4261.7
Secondary Goods							
- Food	29.2	56.2	56.3	91.3	97.6	75.3	405.9
- Electric & Electronics machinery	244.3	134.1	308.2	257.4	399.9	351.8	1695.7
- Textile	10.2	3.9					14.1
- Chemicals	17.9	20.7			30.5	29.4	98.5
- Metal Products	42.2	90.1	247.0	309.1	339.4	433.7	1461.5
- Transport	52.4	8	41.9	18.9	9.3	29.2	159.7
- Pharmaceutical and Medical goods	62.6	81.8	59.1	68.4	88.4	70	430.3
- Plastics and articles thereof	15.7	15.8	16.1	34.8	47.4	42.1	171.9
- Paper & Pulp	10.6	22.4	23.5	23.1	25.0	14.2	118.8
- Rubber and articles thereof							
- Glass and glassware							
- Footwear & articles thereof							
- Ceramic products							
- Miscellaneous manufactured articles	76.7	74.7	79.7	78.0	69.7	95.1	473.9
Sub Total	561.8	507.7	831.8	881	1107.2	1140.8	5030.3
Others	90.1	86.3	157.1	134.4	130.2	123.8	721.9
Grand Total	1007.6	1130.6	1704.7	1776.7	2126.1	2268.2	10013.9

Source: Bangladesh Bank

4.1.1.2 Import from China

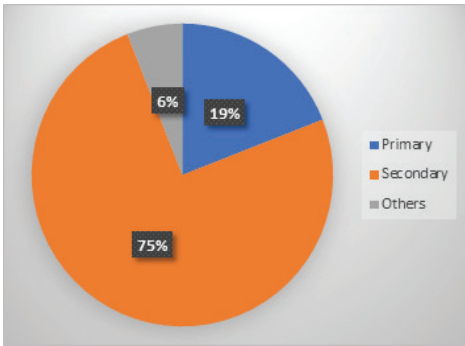
Figure 14 illustrates the import trends of Chinese goods. It is obvious that the import of secondary goods far outweighs other types of import. The overall increase of the secondary goods brought into Bangladesh is unmistakable, despite a slowdown in 2019. Figure 15 provides an alternative perspective. Secondary import accounts for 75% of the total import share. Its nearest competitor, import of primary goods, stood at only 19%.

Figure 14. Sector-by-Sector Import from China, 2015-2020 (Million US\$)



Source: Bangladesh Bank

Figure 15. Sector-By-Sector Import from China, 2015-2020 (%)



Source: Bangladesh Bank

Table 8 presents a fuller elaboration of Chinese import. For secondary products, the chief components are electric and electronics machinery and textile. For primary products, a significant portion is driven by cotton. Cotton's importance, in addition to that of textile, suggests that Chinese firms have found Bangladesh a rather viable destination for the manufacture and eventual export of readymade garments. This will be more fully explored in the subsequent sections.

Table 8. Detailed Breakdown of Import from China, 2015-2020 (Million US\$)

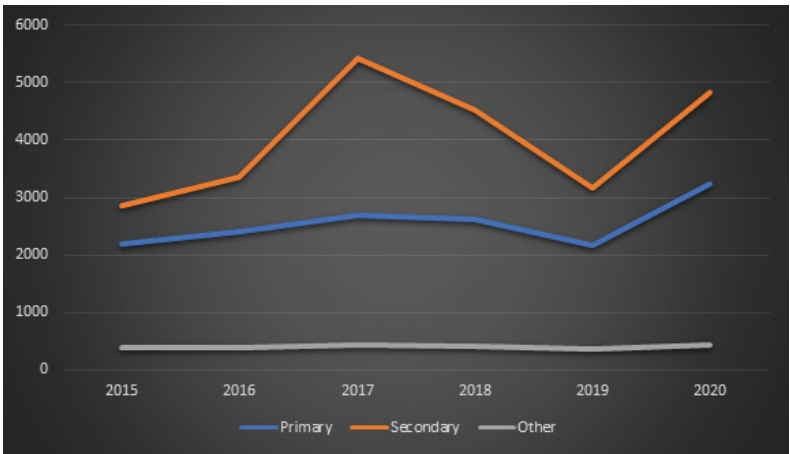
Sector	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Primary goods							
- Cotton	1780.0	1829.9	2053.1	2198.6	1702.0	1541.0	11104.6
- Mineral fuels & Oil	152.6	197.0	294.9	90.6	180.1	261.9	1177.1
- Fruits	74.2	83.3	95.6	71.3	102.1	107.9	534.4
- Vegetables			39.4	34.9	101.8	78.3	254.4
- Coffee, tea & spices			31.5	48.7			80.2
- Salt, Sulphur...	133.1	90.6					223.7
Sub-Total	2139.9	2200.8	2514.5	2444.1	2086	1989.1	13374.4
Secondary goods							
- Electric & Electronics Machinery	2738	3186	3611	4561	3429	3533	21058.4
- Textile	1715.8	1788	2184.5	2768.7	2526.6	2907.1	13890.7
- Chemicals	819.1	725.5	796.2	1025.4	900.6	1185.8	5452.6
- Metal Products	611.3	579.2	831	950.1	698.6	963.5	4633.7
- Transport	252.1	258.6	266.3	360.7	227.7	261.1	1626.5
- Pharmaceutical and Medical goods	93.5	120	122.7	110.1	150.1	182.4	778.8
- Plastics and articles thereof	213.6	238.7	297.9	385.2	417.5	861.5	2414.4
- Paper & Pulp	118.4	130.3	173.9	215.3	165.7	212.0	1015.6
- Rubber and articles thereof	73.7	63.8	74.7	80.5	83.0	102.0	477.7
- Glass and glassware			45.5	70.9	47.8	60.7	224.9
- Footwear & articles thereof			49.7	59.5	54.2	54.2	217.6
- Ceramic products			53.4	43.5			96.9
- Miscellaneous manufactured articles	103.2	118.2	138.4	150.9	131.9	163.6	806.2
Sub-Total	6738.7	7208.3	8645.2	10781.8	8832.7	10486.9	52694
Others	1179.5	1031.8	532.6	413	571.1	449.3	4177.3
Grand Total	10058.1	10440.9	11692.3	13638.9	11489.8	12925.3	70245.7

Source: Bangladesh Bank

4.1.1.3. Import from India

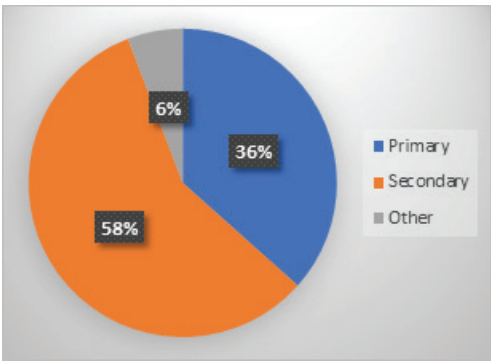
As mentioned earlier, like Chinese import, Indian import into Bangladesh has also been gathering pace. Figure 16 illustrates particularly the growth trajectory of primary and secondary products, even if there was some underperformance between 2017 and 2019. Import of secondary products occupies the largest market position (58%) (see Figure 17).

Figure 16. Sector-by-Sector Import from India, 2015-2020 (Million US\$)



Source: Bangladesh Bank

Figure 17. Sector-by-Sector Import from India, 2015-2020 (%)



Source: Bangladesh Bank

Table 9 presents a more detailed analysis of imported Indian products from 2015 to 2020. For secondary goods, India mainly exports transport equipment, electric and electronic machinery, and chemicals to Bangladesh. These three secondary goods account for more than 50% of the total secondary goods imported from India. For primary goods, cotton has been the most important component. It contributes as much as 60% of the value of total primary goods imported.

Table 9. Detailed Breakdown of Import from India, 2015-2020 (Million US\$)

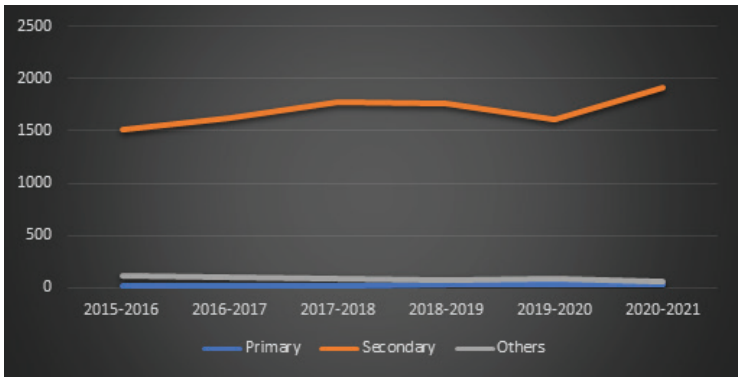
Sector	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Primary goods							
- Cotton	1468.0	1585.7	1729.9	1583.4	1343.2	1997.7	9707.9
- Mineral fuels & Oil	100.7	103.9	181.4	221.4	166.4	365.4	1139.2
- Fruits	67.7	96.9	93.0	142.7	95.0	160.6	655.9
- Vegetables	260.8	200.9	341.9	232.9	137.1	124.6	1298.2
- Seeds, grains & plants	32.2	41.6					73.8
- Coffee, tea & spices	116.4	172.6	154.9	184.1	189.4	291.5	1108.9
- Ores, slag and ash	34.8	38.4	44.8	75.3	65.9	80.8	340
- Salt, Sulphur...	123.5	158.8	151.1	177.6	177.9	211.1	1000
Sub-Total	2204.1	2398.8	2697	2617.4	2174.9	3231.7	15323.9
Secondary Goods							
- Food	313.9	146.3	1369.4	304.6	174.2	1174.3	3482.7
- Electric & Electronics machinery	591.6	669.7	931.9	909.4	572.3	637.2	4312.1
- Textile	218.6	238.5	221.2	269.4	178.7	187.9	1314.3
- Chemicals	463.9	531.2	637	681.9	648.6	844	3806.6
- Metal Products	361.3	432.8	509.12	618.27	472.6	497.7	2891.79
- Transport	510.3	736.5	983.8	1001.7	592.2	669.5	4494
- Pharmaceutical and Medical goods	0	0	30.5	38.5	12.9	78.4	160.3
- Plastics and articles thereof	158.0	193.9	221.0	259.0	213.1	250.6	1295.6
- Paper & Pulp	24.8	34.9	56.0	58.0	54.8	89.2	317.7
- Rubber and articles thereof	73.7	83.8	84.2	98.9	108.0	135.5	584.1
- Glass and glassware							
- Footwear & articles thereof							
- Ceramic products							
- Miscellaneous manufactured articles	133.2	283.6	371.1	286.3	142.8	253.2	1470.2
Sub-Total	2849.3	3351.2	5415.22	4525.97	3170.2	4817.5	24129.39
Others	386.0	393.9	427.1	412.2	368.2	432.7	2420.1
Grand Total	5439.4	6143.9	8539.32	7555.57	5713.3	8481.9	41873.39

Source: Bangladesh Bank

4.1.1.4. Import from Japan

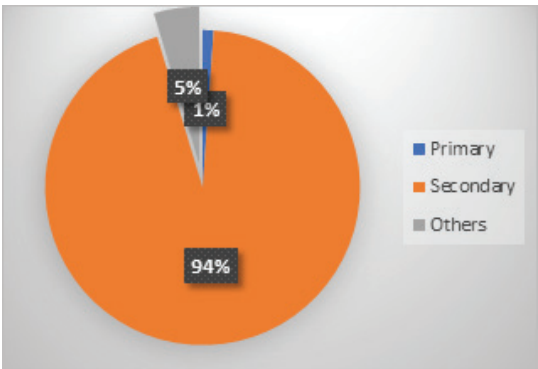
Compared to Chinese and Indian import, the value of Japanese import is noticeably more modest. It is also apparent that Japanese import has been largely driven by secondary goods, although the rate of increase has been somewhat modest (see Figure 18). Figure 19 presents an alternative perspective of secondary goods dominance. By itself, it is worth 94% of the total value.

Figure 18. Sector-by-Sector Import from Japan, 2015-2020 (Million US\$)



Source: Bangladesh Bank

Figure 19. Sector-by-Sector Import from Japan, 2015-2020 (%)



Source: Bangladesh Bank

Table 10 unpacks the distribution of Japanese products brought into Bangladesh. Three items account for over 90% of the total value of secondary goods imported. In order of importance, they are transport equipment (43%), metal products (26.5%), and electric and electronics machinery (21.7%) respectively. The prominence of Japanese transport equipment is most easily observed in the streets of major Bangladeshi cities as Japanese vehicles remain popular choices amongst Bangladeshi consumers.

Table 10. Detailed Breakdown of Import from Japan, 2015-2020 (Million US\$)

Sector	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
Primary goods							
- Cotton							
- Mineral fuels & Oil	0	0	3.5	8.2	0	0	11.7
- Fruits							
- Vegetables							
- Seeds, grains & plants							
- Coffee, tea & spices							
- Ores, slag and ash	0	0	12.9	16	16.8	19.1	64.8
- Salt, Sulphur...	11.6	12.9	0	0	13.5	7.2	45.2
Sub-Total	11.6	12.9	16.4	24.2	30.3	26.3	121.7
Secondary goods							
- Food							
- Electric & Electronics machinery	313.1	444.8	495.4	361.1	302.9	290.2	2207.5
- Textile	23.1	25.5	28.3	32.4	35.6	34.8	179.7
- Chemicals	37.5	34.1	29.5	26.7	28.8	63.5	220.1
- Metal Products	345.9	402.8	427.1	343.4	563.2	620.2	2702.6
- Transport	704.3	651.7	717	898.9	598.8	819.3	4390
- Pharmaceutical and Medical goods	29.7	36.4	40.7	62	42.2	50.5	261.5
- Plastics and articles thereof	49.8	24.3	22.3	17.7	15.4	17.1	146.6
- Paper & Pulp							
- Rubber and articles thereof	14.7	9.4			6.4	7.9	38.4
- Glass and glassware							
- Footwear & articles thereof							
- Ceramic products							
- Miscellaneous manufactured articles			10.2	12.7	10.3	11.5	44.7
Sub-Total	1518.1	1629	1770.5	1754.9	1603.6	1915	10191.1
Others	113.9	93.3	82.7	67.2	86.8	59.9	503.8
Grand Total	1643.6	1735.2	1869.6	1846.3	1720.7	2001.2	10816.6

4.2. Overall Export Performance, 2011-2020

Bangladesh's export structure is not as diversified as that of more developed nations (in this paper, they are the US, China, India and Japan). According to Table 11, it specializes only in relatively simple goods, including readymade garments, jute manufactures, leather and leather products. Amongst the four trade partners, Bangladeshi export is best-received in the US. The total value exported to the US, garnered between 2011 and 2020, is worth a total of US\$41 billion. This amount dwarves the combined export to the three other countries during the same period (see Figure 20). More specifically, Figure 21 shows that Bangladesh exports only around 10% of its goods to China, Japan, and India respectively.

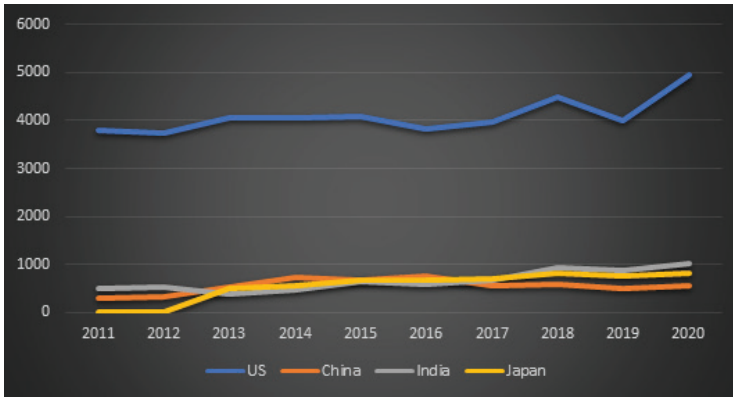
Table 11. Detailed Breakdown of Bangladesh's Export to the US, China, India and Japan, 2011-2020 (in Million US\$)

Country	Commodity	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
US	Readymade Garments	3455	3487	3847	3838	3861	3626	3755	4246	3721	4590	38426
	Fish, Shrimps, Prawns	56	36	52	36	47	44	22	25	18	36	372
	Home Textile	-	48	36	44	36	32	30	23	30	58	337
	Jute Manufactures	16	17	17	18	18	14	19	18	15	21	173
	Leather & Leather Products	9	11	12	14	15	17	19	32	41	63	233
	Raw Jute	2	1	2	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	15
	Handicraft	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	3	3	4	21
	Others	254	122	95	98	99	102	116	144	155	173	1358
	Total	3793	3723	4062	4052	4080	3838	3965	4492	3984	4946	40935

Country	Commodity	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
China	Readymade Garments	59	90	157	244	280	296	257	351	265	213	2212
	Fish, Shrimps, Prawns	6	10	13	12	12	8	9	19	25	5	119
	Home Textile	-	5	6	10	18	6	6	5	5	6	67
	Jute Manufactures	48	50	71	90	70	89	102	85	79	114	798
	Leather & Leather Products	29	59	164	238	218	227	104	39	29	49	1156
	Raw Jute	57	34	25	17	13	19	18	16	17	15	231
	Handicraft	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Others	111	93	97	109	77	105	67	75	79	164	977
	Total	310	341	533	720	688	750	563	590	499	566	5560
India	Readymade Garments	43	59	72	92	104	94	156	282	258	238	1398
	Fish, Shrimps, Prawns	73	38	22	20	19	19	24	26	32	76	349
	Home Textile			3	2	2	2	3	0	0	0	12
	Jute Manufactures	97	129	89	105	190	127	99	122	124	106	1188
	Leather & Leather Products	4	7	9	15	14	8	9	14	15	25	120
	Raw Jute	81	74	23	18	82	76	47	26	44	30	501
	Handicraft	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Others	218	233	178	211	225	255	350	461	393	533	3057
	Total	516	540	396	463	636	581	688	931	866	1008	6625
Japan	Readymade Garments			341	417	511	525	556	676	613	675	4314
	Fish, Shrimps, Prawns			15	16	22	28	19	13	15	16	144
	Home Textile			20	18	23	23	29	26	26	33	198
	Jute Manufactures			6	5	4	4	4	4	4	5	36
	Leather & Leather Products			93	99	90	67	84	80	69	62	644
	Raw Jute			0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
	Handicraft			0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	5
	Others			28	17	25	23	23	25	27	34	202
	Total	0	0	503	573	676	670	716	825	755	826	5544

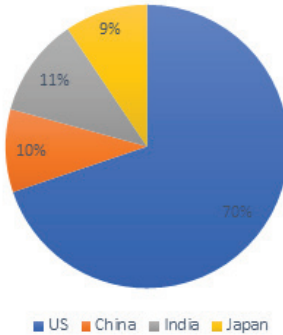
Source: Bangladesh Bank

Figure 20. Bangladesh's Export to the US, China, India and Japan, 2011-2020 (Million US\$)



Source: Bangladesh Bank

Figure 21. Bangladesh's Export to the US, China, India and Japan, 2011-2020 (%)



Source: Bangladesh Bank

The overall picture is that Bangladesh has enjoyed trade surplus with the US. However, it records trade deficit with China, India and Japan. The trade deficit with China especially presents a conundrum to Bangladesh. Comparing Figures 10 and 21, one gets the magnitude of this trade deficit. This trade deficit has even outstripped that of India, Bangladesh's huge neighbor-cum South Asia's hegemon. However, as with any instances of surplus/deficit, there is considerable nuance undergirding this dynamic. The subsequent section offers a more encompassing angle to this situation.

5. Discussion

Numerous discussion points can be had. As far as foreign investment – both flow and stock – is concerned, US firms continue to enjoy predominance in Bangladesh. Their strength derives from a unique combination of factors. Oft-cited examples are access to deep and liquid financial markets, established leadership in major industries, and a well-educated talent pool. Such advantages, when combined, are unparalleled and not readily replicated elsewhere, especially by transition economies such as China. Consequently, the US has ranked among the world's largest investors for decades. On the contrary, Chinese firms, despite their ascendance over the last decades, do not seem to significantly out-invest their Indian and Japanese counterparts in Bangladesh, let alone those from the US. While Chinese FDI inflow spiked in 2018 and 2019, it appears to be an anomalous, one-off event, as far as one can tell from the most available data. Chinese FDI inflow also appears to fluctuate more than that of the three other economies.

Although the exact reasons behind China's fluctuating FDI in Bangladesh falls outside the remit of this paper, it is still possible to draw some tentative implications from the analysis thus far. One plausible cause is the nature of such FDI flows. For starters, it is important to note that US investors typically prefer primary industries, not least mining activities (see Table 2). By contrast, Chinese TNCs mostly finance tertiary industries, including power generation, construction, and communication (see Table 3). Within the tertiary sector, power generation occupies the largest share (90%). The preference for tertiary activities could be due to Chinese firms' structural weakness in the manufacturing sector, as Nolan (2013; 2014) has demonstrated. More importantly, the fact that a significant portion of Chinese FDI in the tertiary sector has financed power generation in Bangladesh suggests the former's complementary relationship with the host nation's wider development efforts. The reality is, developing nations often face energy deficit, especially in power-intensive industries such as mineral processing, when they pursue more rigorous forms of industrialization. This observation contradicts research on Chinese FDI elsewhere. It counters Lim's (2019) study about how China's tertiary sector-heavy outward FDI has truncated long-term industrialization efforts in Southeast Asia, for example. Unlike the approach taken in this paper, his assertion is based on a region-wide analysis, which lacks granular depth vis-à-vis research focusing on a single economy.

What about Indian and Japanese FDI then? Although Indian and Japanese investors have also financed tertiary business activities, it is also clear that a relatively sizable portion of their money has gone towards the manufacturing sector. Their heavier emphasis towards manufacturing likely brings about greater FDI continuity, which is reflected in a smoother FDI trajectory entering Bangladesh. Nevertheless, this remains a conjecture, however interesting, unless further exploration is conducted.

The overriding lesson derived from the examination of FDI patterns is that investors from the four economies are all looking for something different in Bangladesh. While Chinese FDI has grown, the same also can be said of FDI from the US, India and Japan as they find opportunities to expand their respective market share in Bangladesh. The subtext here is that there is a “rising tide lifts all boats” effect at play – *all* four investors target niches where they have a competitive advantage in. They have all benefited from Bangladesh’s continued economic expansion, which in turn creates investment demand across different industries. This finding contradicts the long-held assumption, popular in international political economy and related circles, that China is necessarily locked in a zero-sum competition with the other (US-led) economies in the international system.

When it comes to trade, the reality is that Bangladesh is still at a relatively underdeveloped stage, which means that it would have to import virtually all types of sophisticated products. By the same token, there exists plenty of scope to export goods that it possesses comparative advantage in such as garments and agriculture products. This is inferred from Bangladesh’s export and import with the US, China, India and Japan – they have all increased over the last decade. While it is easy to bemoan the trade deficit incurred against China, India and Japan, it is just as important to recognize Bangladesh’s trade surplus with the US. In practical terms, Bangladesh is becoming more attractive as a manufacturing center. This is evident in the goods it exports to the US, largely readymade garments (see Table 11). These readymade garments are likely the outcome of foreign TNCs establishing operations in Bangladesh, along with the processing of raw materials brought in from other countries within the supply chain.

A reexamination of Table 8 offers further insight. The data indicates that electric and electronics machinery, textile, and cotton are three of the most commonly imported items from China. Some of the machinery would be deployed in garment factories where textile and cotton are processed,

manufacturing the latter into finished, readymade garments popular among US consumers. To a smaller extent, this “Factory Asia” business model – which involves importing and enhancing inputs from other Asian economies before selling the final products to the US – can also be inferred by studying the portfolio of goods imported from India and Japan (see Tables 9 and 10). This discovery supports Xing (2021) and Kam (2017), who argue that global trade has increasingly shifted from trading finished products to trading specialized tasks. This shift offers developing nations like Bangladesh, with ample low-cost labor, an opportunity to participate in the production networks of (Global North) TNCs. However, it also means that crucial knowledge and expertise remain in the hands of these TNCs instead of local firms in the host economies. Until and unless the latter pushes for wider and deeper know-how localization, this dynamic will not likely change substantially.

For Bangladesh at least, it is imperative to craft industrial policies to more effectively leverage the current “sweet spot” that it is in. The country’s economic strategy is primarily centered around its cost advantage in labor-intensive industries, which has served it well thus far. However, this advantage is poised to diminish in the years ahead. The key, instead, lies in progressively nudging the South Asian economy towards more sophisticated activities that yield higher value-added. It is thus crucial to heed the development lessons from some of East Asia’s tiger economies, particularly Malaysia and Thailand (Sen & Tyce, 2019). These nations, during their high-growth era between the 1970s and the 1990s, relied heavily on low labor costs and a fairly conducive business environment. However, they have since struggled in transitioning towards higher value-added activities which require increasingly complex technologies and higher quality human capital (see also (Wang & Lim, 2023).

Additionally, a more geopolitical interpretation of the above development can be postulated. First and foremost, should there be fear regarding Bangladesh’s growing trade deficit with the Chinese? If the answer is yes, then should not there be just as much fear when it comes to trade deficit with other nations, especially India? As demonstrated earlier on (see Figure 9), Indian import – while not as large as that of Chinese import – still ranks second in the portfolio. More to the point, India is South Asia’s hegemon and possesses sufficient heft to sway Bangladeshi sentiment across different spheres. For example, there has been some disquiet regarding the

pro-Indian stance of the incumbent Awami League government (Rahman, 2009). If there was indeed a risk of trade dependency or other types of vulnerabilities, then Bangladesh is prudent to err on the side of caution by “spreading” it across multiple countries (especially China) rather than “concentrating” it in the hands of a regional hegemon like India. By the same token, it would make sense to court Chinese FDI to ensure that Bangladesh is not overly reliant on a single country for investment capital.

6. Conclusion

The paper has compared and contrasted China’s economic presence in Bangladesh vis-à-vis that of the US, India and Japan. By examining FDI and trade statistics, a series of findings have been unearthed. Firstly, although Chinese FDI is growing in Bangladesh, at least after the early 2010s, FDI from the three other economies has also expanded. Interestingly, both flow and stock of FDI from the US is distinctively dominant vis-à-vis the three other economies over the period examined. It is also important to note that US firms mostly funded primary industries. Chinese firms mainly financed tertiary activities, while their Indian and Japanese counterparts have devoted considerable amount of FDI towards the secondary industries.

Secondly, as it is still an industrializing economy, Bangladesh must import virtually all its capital goods, while exporting several agricultural goods and labor-intensive manufactures (e.g. readymade garments). This means that it is bound to record trade deficit against most industrialized economies. To this end, this paper has illustrated Bangladeshi trade deficit against China, India and Japan. The South Asian nation enjoys trade surplus only with the US, driven by garments export. More interestingly, trade deficit incurred against China has outstripped that of India, South Asia’s traditional hegemon. This implies some risk “spreading” or “de-risking” as Bangladesh has usually incurred very large trade deficit against India. By the same token, overdependence on China can be avoided through promoting trade ties with India and other economies.

Going back to the paper’s introduction section, should there be fear or anxiety about China’s growing investment and trade presence in Bangladesh? Phrased differently, are there clear evidences of China dominating the Bangladeshi economy? On the basis of the evidence presented thus far, the answer is in the negative as far as FDI is concerned. If anything, it is the US investors which exert the most influence in Bangladesh, outcompeting

investors from the other three economies by a huge margin. When it comes to trade dynamics, the prognosis is similar. It is true that Bangladesh records a huge trade deficit against China, but this is also the case for its bilateral trade with India (and to a smaller extent, Japan). The fundamental reality, which often goes unmentioned, is China's status as a latecomer to the South Asian as well as international economy. This means that Chinese firms face an uphill task in displacing firms from more developed nations (e.g. Japan and the US) in expanding their activities across borders. This "incumbency effect" is likely to hold sway, at least for the foreseeable future. Relatedly, Bangladesh's flourishing economic progress over the last decade or so has generated a growing middle class and budding industrial sector. This indirectly creates a "rising tide lifts all boats" effect for economic partners such as the US and China. Virtually all of them have captured niches within the Bangladeshi market. Put together, there is little to substantiate the fearmongering discourse commonly seen in certain circles.

In future research, prospective analysts are encouraged to more rigorously test hypotheses sparked by this paper's findings. The current statistical database provided by the respective governmental agencies, while useful, is not sufficiently fine-grained for researchers to perform more comprehensive examination of Chinese FDI and trade in Bangladesh than what this paper has done. Additional spotlight on how increased Chinese presence is impacting diverse economic, political, ethnic interests would likely extend this paper's findings. Another fruitful research agenda could also be had, for example, by comparing and contrasting the performance of one to several industries where Chinese economic presence is significant. In either case, there is merit in conducting detailed interviews with representatives from the government as well as private sector. An understanding of their viewpoints would help to untangle potentially unobservable mechanisms linking industrial transformation with the influx of particular types of TNCs.

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Fluid Population, Fixed Territory: Fantasizing a Non-solution to the US-China-Taiwan Status Quo

Chih-yu Shih*

Department of Political Science, National Taiwan University
School of Political Science and International Relations, Tongji University

Abstract

The US-China rivalry over Taiwan reveals the security issue's ontological nature. If Taiwan were to become an independent sovereign nation, no immediate change in the balance of global power need occur. However, it would destroy the regime legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party and strengthen the US' reputation as the protector of liberal democracy. Against this background of deadlock, the idea of singular sovereignty has been an obstacle to any solution. This essay aims to provoke consideration of a non-solution that targets the population's identity rather than the territory, where the Taiwanese population substitute two concurrent passports, one from the People's Republic of China and the other from the US, for its present Taiwan passport. This essay argues that under this paradigm, unification with China would cease to allude negatively to security and the US-China rivalry would turn into coexistence. The discussion has policy implications for disputes of territorial jurisdiction elsewhere.

Keywords: *US-China rivalry, Taiwan independence, China's unification, Sovereignty, ontological security.*

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* Chih-yu Shih teaches international relations theory, anthropology of knowledge, and China studies at National Taiwan University and Tongji University. His current research on the intellectual history of China studies is accessible at <http://www.china-studies.taipei/>. His postal address is Department of Political Science, National Taiwan University, 1, Sec. 4, Roosevelt Rd., Taipei, Taiwan 10617; and his email, cyshih@ntu.edu.tw.

1. Introduction

Two simultaneous topics have loomed increasingly popular among East Asian security watchers amidst and since Russia's war in Ukraine. One, a stream of discussion fills think tank reports in the Anglosphere, is when and how the People's Liberation Army will follow suit with a unification war against Taiwan, which could confront and end US dominance in East Asia (Klingner, 2022; Keegan & Churchman, 2022, 93-94; Faisal, 2022; Thompson, 2022: 3-4; Noboru, 2022; Analytica, 2022). The other stream of discussion, which has interested a huge number of Chinese bloggers, is how the White House can instigate Taiwan into an independence war with China to trap the state (O'Neil, 2022) into being the world's enemy as the war in Ukraine has made Russia (Sher, 2022).¹ Taiwan and Ukraine differ in terms of their culture, history, and geography, indicating that the imagined parallel draws upon realist international relations in terms of the small actors' need to take sides during hegemonic competition. On these topics, Taiwan's adamant pro-US and anti-China position ostensibly lacks relevance (Allison, 2022; CBS News, 2022; Pardo de Santayana, 2022). After all, Taiwan renounces a genuine choice for it sets aside plausible alternatives of bandwagoning China, hedging between the US and China, or posing neutrality. Note the shared assumption of all the speculations, conspiracy theories, choices, and plausible alternatives—Taiwan is a territorial identity, bounded yet vulnerable, for all sides to strategize to enforce each's claimed orders (Horton, 2022; Scobell & Stevenson-Yang, 2022).

The shared assumption reveals the ontological nature of the Taiwan security issue (Boyle, 2021; Chen & Shimizu, 2019). For Taiwan to officially become an independent, i.e., sovereign, nation, no immediate change in the balance of power would occur. However, it would destroy the regime legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party, which rests upon a national revivalist promise to cleanse all the imperialist and colonialist legacies from modern Chinese history (Hagstrom, 2021, 339; Chavoshi & Saeidabadi, 2021). This entails unification with Taiwan. Taiwan's independence would also strengthen the US' hegemonic leadership embedded in its reputation as the protector of liberal democracy and rules of international relations (Heritage & Lee, 2020: 207-210). Therefore, effective hegemonic order, in Graham Allison's terms (Allison, 2017), would rule out unification. Moreover, Taiwan's independence would affirm its proponents' quest for self-respect undergirded by a sense of civilizational superiority over China

(Chen-Dedman, 2022; Chen, 2020). Colonial modernity from Japan and neoliberal partnership with the US would enhance such self-respect (Rigger, 2021; Liu, 2021; Bunskoek, 2020: 232-6).

Against this background, which promises no way out (Heritage & Lee, 2020: 219-223; Zuo, 2018: 169; Zhang & Lebow, 2020; Glaser, 2015), this provocative essay impractically considers a solution, practically a non-solution, intended to prompt out-of-box thinking that does not take for granted sovereignty as the conceptual base to devise a settlement (Krickel-Choi, Chen & Bukh, 2022). Instead, the solution targets the population's identity instead of the territory and recognizes that the population is readily fluid (Shimizu, 2019). Specifically, the solution is for the Taiwanese population to substitute two concurrent passports, one from the People's Republic of China and the other from the United States, for its present Taiwan (i.e., the Republic of China) passport.

The essay is divided into two parts. The first part reviews how the literature is consistently tied to national sovereignty. The second part shows how a twin passport arrangement would transcend the sovereignty system, reconfigure ontological security, and turn Taiwan into a pluriversal, as opposed to territorial, identity. The conclusion will mention caveats.

2. The Sovereignty-locked Literature

The literature on the hegemonic transition makes the dominant international relations approach to the Taiwan issue (Chang-Liao & Chi Fang, 2021, Huang, 2019; Zuo, 2021; Pan, 2003). In this thread of literature, China is allegedly a revisionist state that seeks to overtake the United States (Hass, 2021; Pillsbury, 2015; Mearsheimer, 2014; Friedberg, 2011; Christensen, 2002). Two revisionist dimensions denote the hegemonic transition (Rolland, 2020; National Security Strategy of the United States of America, 2017; Department of Défense, 2018). One is the all-around rising power of China to engage in world affairs and inflict damage to US influence. This dimension is geostrategic and manifests in China's omniscient investment in Africa, emerging networking in Latin America, and assertive stance in the South China Sea. The other is the potential of China's authoritarian model of governance to attract followers in the Global South (Greitens, 2020; Diamond & Schell, 2018). Given Taiwan's identity as a liberal democracy and how tremendously a unification with Taiwan would boost China's nationalism, the scholars alert to hegemonic transition cannot afford to leave territorial Taiwan's future alone.

The discussions on the inevitability of the hegemonic war often depict Taiwan as a potential point of an outbreak. If the narrative deems hegemonic war as escapable, the narrators' position on Taiwan is usually inarticulate and ambiguous (Haass, 2021; Rigger, 2021; Bush, 2016). On the contrary, in the narrative of an inevitable war, Taiwan would pose as strategic leverage (Lin, 2021; Hunzeker & Weng, 2020). The war in Ukraine even gives some analysts the impression that Taiwan could fight a vicarious war on behalf of the US (Seligman, 2022). The perspective of hegemonic competition thus focuses only on Taiwan as a strategic resource, regardless of the distinctive issue contexts of the two sites, that complicate and qualify their comparison. On the other hand, the Chinese scholarly opinion tends to refute the suggestions of inevitability (Wang, 2022; Wang, 2021). Almost no Chinese literature would convey an inevitability of unification as if unification and the continuation of peace between the US and China would have no contradiction. The implication is that any concession in exchange for US consent to unification is negotiable from the Chinese standpoint. The Chinese literature thus reproduces Taiwan as a fixed boundary. This is the same epistemological foundation for the US strategizing Taiwan in its China policy.

Another related thread of the literature attends to US national interests (Schell & Shirk, 2019; Stokes, 2017; Harding, 2015). The debate focuses on Taiwan's importance to the US' long-term interests. On one side of the debate, Taiwan fares insignificant, given that Taiwan represents China's vital interest but only a moderate one for the US (Mearsheimer, 2014; Gilly, 2010). According to this view, allowing Taiwan's independence to take priority over other US agendas makes little sense. The narrators in this stream of thought either believe in the renouncement of Taiwan as a US interest or conservatively consider the value of an indefinite medium term of the status quo, in which Taiwan does not officially declare independence and China does not push for unification (Lin & Zhou, 2018; Tuckre & Glaser, 2011: 35). Alongside is the suggestion of Finlandization as a possible approach for Taiwan to take in the face of a menacing China (Gilly, 2010). The unstated logic of these discussions is entirely territorial. Namely, under the circumstance that the US would not possibly own Taiwan strategically, the US could only yield Taiwan to China or keep Taiwan from China at most.

The other side of the debate takes an all-society approach to cope with the threat of Chinese revisionism, an increasingly favoured position in

the United States in the recent decade. The need to keep the US ahead of China makes allying with Taiwan more closely a temptation that cannot be resisted. This position treats Taiwan's remaining autonomous, if not officially independent, from China as a genuine strategic value (Wang, 2018). It calls for an overall strategy, with the support of the allies, to enhance Taiwan's international stance, including participation in international organizations, diplomatic recognition by a minimal number of states, security guarantees by the US and its allies, and legitimacy in replacing "Chinese Taipei" with "Taiwan" as its official label wherever enforceable (Lin, 2021).

The Taiwan studies literature is a third thread of the literature which is indirect but essential to reproducing sovereign sensibilities. This literature has had a long history. Its origin reflected a discursive renovation seeking to rescue USA's reputation in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. The renovation proceeded with the cooking up of four tigers—the newly industrialized countries of Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. This was the first time Taiwan was a legitimate topic independent from China studies in the academic world (Shih, 2007). In addition to reducing Vietnam from its victory to a failing state, Taiwan provided ammunition for neoliberal colleagues to craft a rebuttal against the dependency theory, which blames underdevelopment in Latin America on world capitalism (Gold, 1986, 122–134). Samuel Huntington's publication of *The Third Wave* (Chu, 2012; Tien, 1996), together with Taiwan's political development in the early 1990s, promoted Taiwan as a model of democratization and a curious trajectory (Rubinstein, 2016). Internationally, the officially sanctioned research agenda of the strategic triangle boomed in the same decade to involve numerous Western and Taiwanese scholars to interrogate how Taiwan could fare in the US-China-Taiwan relations, further reinforcing Taiwan as a structurally equal identity in the academic world (Clark, 2011; DeLisle, 2010; Dittmer, 2005; Wu, 2005; Dickson, 2002; Carpenter, 2000).

After that, through grants from the semi-official Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation, the promotion of Taiwan studies in the West has been Taiwan's national endeavour and successfully established Taiwan studies as a brand-named discipline in comparative studies.² The topics are broad, but the theme and message are consistent and focused throughout. In short, Taiwan is a dynamic place where local practices testify to the voice, construction, innovation, and ambivalence of researched targets, the four terms that characterize Routledge's Taiwan series in 2022 (Fell, 2021; Hou, 2022; Fan,

2020; Huang, 2022). Together, they give rise to the varieties, possibilities, and reinventions of Taiwanese subjectivities. Taiwan can hardly be described in a nutshell, except that Taiwan is anything but Chinese. Such cultural sovereign consciousness is not directly territorial. As Cambridge University's *Taiwan Studies Series* states:

This book series presents a nuanced and close-to-the-ground analysis of Taiwan, a critical node in US-China-Japan competition in the Asia-Pacific region. It studies the island's social complexities and transitions from the geopolitical perspective while also focusing closely on its people's lives and cultural vibrancy.³

Even so, the resulting impossibility of calling Taiwan Chinese in this nascent literature continues to privilege territorial sovereignty peculiarly—Taiwan is by all means outside China's sovereign territory. The studies of Taiwanese business people and students in China are preoccupied with the findings that their identification with Taiwan remains resilient (Momesso & Lee, 2019; Lan & Wu, 2016; Tseng, 2015: 196-200). From the point of view of literature, Taiwan is full of agency for constant changes and differences to the extent that Taiwan is not a substantive label in itself while Taiwan is increasingly un-Chinese. Arguably, the determined quest for un-Chinese subjectivities necessitates the celebration of undecidability. Sovereignty is the discursive equivalent of subjectivities informed by undecidability qua un-Chineseness. The political implications are both China losing Taiwan as part of its territory and the US losing Taiwan if China would force unification.

3. An Exit from Sovereignty

Sovereignty is particularly unfit for the population in Taiwan as a representative institution or identity. To begin, sovereignty was the result of initially a bunch of European practices to transcend the City of God during the Religious War (Osiander, 2001). It presumably enabled the princes to choose their ways of being Christian. Sovereignty did not apply to colonies in the subsequent centennials until the decolonization after WWII. Despite that, the meanings of sovereignty have evolved and turned according to the practices of the Christian nations, such that becoming sovereign has always been a triumph for former colony states (Clapham, 1999), i.e., the Global South. Regimes in Taiwan, by all means, have likewise yearned for sovereign status regardless of which national identity they claim during their terms.

Still, the postcolonial conditions promise a Global South nation neither equality nor independence (Pourmokhtari, 2013). In practice, they turn sovereignty as a domain question into a people's question. Postcolonial nations cannot command the ready loyalty of their population, for their artificial borders cut across ethnic and religious identities to inflict domestic social and cross-border cleavages that disallow either the emergence of civil society or the planning of good governance. The entitlement to sovereign protection is an unattainable assumption. Sovereignty plagued by these cleavages fails to clarify who belongs or whom to exclude from within. In addition, migration between colonies and former colonizer communities further complicates the people's identification (De Genova, 2010) from a fixed population into a trans-population. From the sovereignty point of view, every Taiwanese person can be a suspect for insufficient normativity, a strategic balancer between the birthplace and homes in the US, China, Australia, Southeast Asia, and Europe, and a bridge between incongruent sites as an interpreter or buffer (Bunskoek, 2020).

The quest for sovereignty by the postcolonial Taiwanese regimes reflects, recreates, and reproduces colonially inflicted civilizational cleavages. All sides remain simultaneously embedded in different degrees of Chinese, American/Western, and Japanese relations. Taiwan's sovereign sensibilities are registered in several contradictions that suffer politicization and push for side-taking regarding belonging or not belonging to any particular sovereignty. At least four pairs of contradictions can be identified.

- (1) Taiwan's independent sovereignty denotes self-determination of the population for Taiwan's pro-independence regime but self-denial for the Chinese government.
- (2) It is defensive from the point of view of maintaining hegemonic order but offensive from the perspective of Chinese nationalism.
- (3) It is a statement of owning modernity for the people of Taiwan but a security concern from the US grand strategy point of view.
- (4) It connotes de-Sinicizing, as opposed to a return of colonial legacy, from Taiwan's internal cleavage point of view.

These four pairs of contradictions guarantee the implausibility of any settlement within the epistemological scope of sovereignty that stresses a single highest authority in the bounded borders. Not only the population

in Taiwan is divided, but the population is living across borders and experiencing an internal split whenever a sovereignty-induced interrogation is involved. Many Taiwanese families have second or third homes in China and the US. Some may conveniently invoke different stances at different sites on sovereign belonging (Tseng, 2015). None of these features make the Taiwanese distinctive from other people until the US-China rivalry compels them to choose sides. Before China could challenge the hegemonic order, the US was not alerted to the possibility of China's armed unification, and China could bear with Taiwan's autonomy short of an official pledge of independent sovereignty. In short, there used to be a non-solution through which China and Taiwan could bypass the sovereignty issue. The non-solution is no longer convincing in the 21st century, with the protection of one's sovereign status threatening the continuity of another's sovereign status (Mastro, 2021; Zhen, 2021).

The opposite to the current non-solution, which rests upon the power asymmetry of the US over China and China over Taiwan, could be another non-solution given the asymmetry of the US over China turning obscure in general and on the Taiwan issue in particular (Ling, Hwang & Chen, 2010). The following non-solution, impractical but illuminating, is to turn Taiwan's non-sovereignty into twin sovereignty. Consider that both China and the US issue passports automatically to any Taiwanese who choose to have both. All the strategic resources that the US might lose to China, including the frequently mentioned world's leading semi-conductor sectors, could remain in the hands of the Americans after Taiwan and China reunite. The Taiwanese claim to civilizational superiority due to institutional intimacy between Taiwan and the US would no longer need to be anti-Chinese. Taiwan would not need to declare independence from China with the population legally owning non-Chinese citizenship. However, China's quest for unification would also come true, not by territorial occupation and subjugation of the Taiwanese people, but by integrating the same-passport holders across the Taiwan Straits. However, interpretations about Taiwan's sovereign status might evolve, the Chinese would still own Taiwan's sovereignty.

As a bilingual person needs not declare her loyalty to only one of the two tongues while translating between the two language communities, a twin-passport Taiwanese could avoid the interrogation of her loyalty that would follow the convention of single sovereignty. An in-between

condition can be either a liability or an asset. First, the twin sovereignty makes a consensual value for different sides of the cleavage to ease mutual aversion caused by colonial and Civil War legacies. Second, without the need to settle on which sovereignty to claim, the US and China could resolve the hegemonic competition over the future of Taiwan. Third, once the anxiety toward the other side colluding with Taiwan to tilt the status quo subsides, the spiral of the security dilemma would lose momentum. In the last incidence, as long as unification is between the populations, it is not equivalent to the conquest of territory. The threat of revisionism would decrease. On the contrary, unification could breed a pluriversal order (Behr & Shani, 2022: 375).

Pluriversal international relations celebrate the coexistence of various relational configurations, that are informed not only by languages, religions, conventions, and the means of production but also, most significantly, by colonial networking. One rising agenda is the Global South, defined as the sites of colonization. A major feature of the Global South is the mingling of populations whose living necessities, social relationships, and political loyalty transcend borders, while being continuously regulated by multiple states. A vast number of migrants hold dual passports for the colonizer states and former colony states. Different states regulate and serve them in different ways, and they adapt to the contexts imbued with incompatible values, ways of life, and views of moral correctness. Pluriversalism describes the coexistence of these threads of relationality and their fluid representations. Individual lives and the capacities of the states are similarly constituted by pluriversalism, with only the former capable of strategizing such hybridity. The irony of “a fluid population, a fixed territory” indicates “realistic people, unrealistic states.” Such irony gives a clue regarding why the states will not adopt the twin-passport solution in practice and why its revelation among academics and think tanks can contribute to a critical reflection on the territorial fixation in the long term.

Even so, the twin-sovereignty non-solution would not be deemed entirely impractical if the relevant authorities could acknowledge that the situation of people holding two passports is already widespread anywhere in the world, including among Chinese citizens. Such an arrangement is not even unfamiliar at the group level as all the people of Northern Ireland are entitled to both the Irish and the British passports. The historical conditions of Northern Ireland are different in the sense that Taiwan has

been ethnically and culturally more Chinese than American, yet sought to become legally non-Chinese. In addition, Great Britain and Ireland are not rivals, as revisionism vs. anti-revisionism concerning the overall order. The international significance of the Northern Irish case is thus limited.

4. Conclusion

Conventionally, sovereignty defines territory, which defines the population. In contrast, the fantasy of twin sovereignty redefines the population, who redefine the territory. Note that singular sovereignty is the technical condition that allows the competition over the future of Taiwan to become an exercise in political correctness. Sovereignty has been an obstacle to any solution and an impulse of intense rivalry. A de-territorializing unification through fluid passport-bodies could be socially more genuine and deeper than an institutionally imposed symbolic name change because monitoring and disciplining any previously perceived incorrectness would become unnecessary for alarmists of either side. The topics of unification processes would cease alluding negatively to security. On the contrary, they would simultaneously facilitate the mingling of the US and China and turn a rival relationship into coexistence. An alternative could be a twin passport of China and Taiwan, instead of the US, that would request much fewer procedural arrangements and less emotional adjustment but might cause anxiety of loss among many an American Thucydides.

One caveat to make for the idea of twin sovereignty is that it could ironically cause a sense of simultaneous alienation from China and the US, the opposite of the present internal cleavage, as a Northern Irish person can be confused about her identity (Liston & Moreland, 2009, 127; Coakley, 2007). Another caveat would be the extended desire for third passports, such as the Japanese, the Australian, or the Canadian passport. Yet another caveat is the provocative effect twin sovereignty could have on the existing autonomous jurisdiction of minorities elsewhere to escalate the politics of identity. A general challenge to the sovereign system may ensue. What would these caveats lead to? A conversation between Professor Hirano Kenichiro and myself in 2005 is probably a proper ending. He asked me what would be an ideal substitute for the sovereign state. I incurred the metaphor of a maintenance garage that provides service to all brand automobiles—a metaphor for the fluid Global South population—but with a higher charge on other brands. He approved partially and questioned how a garage could

guarantee the security of its customers. He suggested that a prefectural system that keeps the police force would be his ideal substitute.

Notes

- ¹ More attention is given to the arrangements of encircling China from neighbouring countries and NATO involvement, in addition to Taiwan's street war capabilities. <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2022/05/04/the-real-lesson-of-the-war-in-ukraine-for-taiwan/>.
- ² Every call for application specifically states that "Projects on Taiwan Studies are especially encouraged." <http://www.cckf.org/en/programs>.
- ³ See <https://www.cambridge.org/core/series/taiwan-studies/03CFE4AE52D0E497ADDA27660C4C1B7A>.

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The Communication Effect of Thai Public Service Advertising in China: A Semiotic Analysis

Wei Huang, Ratanachote Thienmongkol and Natirath Weeranakin*

Department of New Media, Faculty of Informatics, Mahasarakham University

Abstract

With the increasing significance of public service advertising in information dissemination and value guidance, the dissemination effect of Thai public service advertisements in China has attracted widespread attention. This study selected 20 Thai public service advertisements from 2015 to 2022. It uses case analysis and semiotic theory to deeply explore the role of visual and auditory symbols in the effectiveness and dissemination of Thai public service advertisements. Questionnaire survey and in-depth interview methods were used to research the dissemination effects of Thai public service advertisements on Chinese audiences. Research has found that in Thai public service advertisements, using populist character symbols, philosophical textual symbols, realistic scene symbols, and appropriate auditory symbols can significantly improve advertising effectiveness and the spread of information. Thai public service advertising is found to significantly impact Chinese audiences in the aspects of cognition, attitude, and behaviour. This study provides a reference for creating and disseminating Chinese public service advertising. It is expected to promote further the exploration of content production in Chinese public service advertising.

Keywords: *Thai public service advertising, Semiotics, Communication effects, Advertising symbols.*

* Wei Huang is a doctoral student in the Department of New Media at the Faculty of Informatics at Mahasarakham University. Ratanachote Thienmongkol, PhD and Natirath Weeranakin, PhD are both Associate Professors in the same department.

1. Introduction

Rapid economic development and cultural integration have diversified people's values and morals in modern society. The viewpoints conveyed by public service advertisements can improve the audience's quality of life and morality and promote civilized and orderly development of the entire society (O'Keefe & Reid, 2020). The definition of public service advertising is relatively straightforward, mainly referring to non-profit advertising whose core purpose is to serve public interest (O'Barr, 2012). As a tool for influencing public awareness and an essential factor in shaping specific behaviours, public service advertising is seen as a field of interaction between society, public organizations, businesses, and government agencies. It is a targeted way to impact society and aims to solve social problems (Zaitseva, 2020). The influence of public service advertising is particularly evident in the case of Thailand. Thai public service advertising has diverse creative ideas and styles with excellent advertising effects (Chantamas & Chaisuwan, 2020). In recent years, it has won numerous awards at international advertising festivals such as Asia Pacific, New York, and Cannes, earning praise in the global advertising industry. The types of Thai public service advertisements studied in this article are mainly special advertising activities funded by enterprises to arouse public attention towards a particular social issue or concept. There are no commercial symbols in the advertisement content, but most will have the company logo or short slogans at the end of the film.

In China, the impact of Thai public service advertising is significant. Through mainstream media platforms such as Baidu, Sina Weibo, and Tencent Video in China, it can be observed that Thai public service advertising has a high search volume and has often become a hot topic of discussion (Tu, 2018). Many Chinese audiences love Thai advertising (Shang, 2023).

The success behind Thai public service advertising is primarily due to its unique symbolic application. According to research, Thai public service advertising producers use semiotic theory to construct amazing advertising creativity and art from the perspectives of character symbols, scene symbols, action symbols, etc., in their advertising creations, making Thai public service advertisements more attractive (Yang, 2019). Although these studies have not thoroughly analysed the mechanism of semiotics, the semiotic analysis methods can provide valuable inspiration for subsequent research.

After more than 30 years of growth and improvement, Chinese public service advertising has made a qualitative improvement in creativity. However, it still faces some challenges that cannot be ignored: the execution is relatively basic, the government still leads the planning and broadcasting of advertising, and the participation of enterprises is still at a relatively low level. In addition, the content of Chinese public service advertising is severely similar, lacks creativity, and there is still a particular gap in overall production quality and advertising influence compared to other advertising powerhouses (S. Liu, 2021).

Given this, this study takes a typical case of public service advertising in Thailand as the research object. Through in-depth exploration of symbolic strategies in Thai public service advertising, the study learns and draws on the advantages of Thailand in public service advertisement production, enriching relevant theories in the field of advertising, and studying how to effectively increase the expressive power and influence of public service advertising through semiotics. In addition, this study demonstrates how semiotics can be applied in public service advertising to help advertisers create more attractive and infectious content, providing new suggestions and references for improving the dissemination effect of Chinese public service advertising.

2. Literature Review

A lot of rich research has been conducted on public service advertising from different perspectives, including the nature of public service advertising, the dissemination effect of public service advertising, the audience of public service advertising, and so on. Relevant literature will be built on based on the theme of this study, with a focus on the following perspectives:

From the perspective of studying the dissemination effect of public service advertising, scholars mainly explore the dissemination effect of traditional public service advertising on television media and the dissemination effect of public service advertising on social media. With the rise of short video platforms, scholars have also begun to pay attention to the production and dissemination models of public service advertising in short videos. For example, television public service advertising can create a healthy and harmonious society, build a value system, and cultivate role models (Ying Zhang, 2016). L. Liu (2021) focuses on the dissemination effects of public service advertising on Weibo in different countries and

explores the reasons and inspirations behind them. Xie (2021) studies the communication effect and influencing factors of public service advertising on the TikTok platform. Wan (2017) proposed suggestions for the effectiveness of public service advertising dissemination through the lens of channels and trends, taking into account changes in the ecological environment in the era of integrated media. Zhu (2021) analysed the dissemination effect of panoramic video public service advertising from visual, auditory, and emotional guidance perspectives.

Some scholars also conduct research that consider public service advertising audiences. There are many angles for studying the audience of public service advertising, such as focusing on advertising communication from the standpoint of audience cognition, studying the correlation between audience psychology and public service advertising performance techniques, and paying attention to the emotional and behavioural impact of the audience. Park (2016) used cognitive response methods to process information for audiences exposed to particular Olympic public service advertising information. Gan (2015) analysed the correlation between public service advertising performance techniques and audience psychology in new media, including fear-based, humorous, situational contagion-based, rhetorical, etc. Cho (2021) took public service advertising in China and South Korea as the object and, based on Hofstede's cultural dimension theory, considered the impact of gender differences in television public service advertising on the attitudes and behaviours of audiences in China and South Korea under different cultural conditions. Influenced by the background environment, the audience responds well to public service advertising in terms of emotional effects and perception, which are related to fear, comedy, and empathy (Junyan Huo, 2023). The response factors of the audience to public service advertising, according to a survey conducted by Çubuk and Aydınlioğlu (2023), audiences have different preferences, including "attractive copy and images" "positive stories" and "dramatic and impactful stories".

In literature regarding the main focus of this study, i.e. Thai public service advertising, scholars analyse the aspects of creativity and narrative, exploring the creative style, methods, and reasons behind its high-level creativity. Two examples of Thai public service advertising styles are humour and heartwarming stories. Thai advertisements often incorporate both local Thai culture and Western elements (Nelson & Paek, 2007; Z. Yu, 2021). The

use of animal elements such as dogs to highlight the camera's main body and lay the groundwork for a subsequent plot reversal is an example of creative methods in Thai advertising in film and television. Creative composition, comfortable colours, and sound effects are also used to enhance humour (Z. Li, 2017). Thailand's complex and unique cultural charm, open economic and social environment, and high-level advertising talent contribute to its advanced advertising creativity (Z. Liu, 2006). Regarding creative expression techniques, emotion is used to appeal to the audience, often adopting a populist approach and showcasing local characteristics. Family-oriented advertising often uses a warm and touching approach (Wang, 2017).

For the narrative techniques of Thai public service advertising, scholars focus on their storytelling methods and causal narrative approaches. Cheryl and Ayob (2020) argue that most Thai advertising uses a storytelling narrative approach. Further, advertisers create a unique cultural expression of humanistic care and emotional value through unique emotional narratives (Niu, 2019). The narrative strategy of Thai public service advertising also includes narratives centred on cause and effect, emotional resonance inside and outside the narrative, and the process of achieving true equality (Xiong, 2018). Thai public service advertising is adept at using reverse plots to drive the audience's emotions, spreading public service advertising attitudes through concepts, and enhancing the story's connotation through cultural core (Sun, 2020), mainly adopting a causal narrative structure, presenting the plain narrative style of Thai public service advertising through storytelling (Chu, 2017). Its themes include love, social morality, and motivation. The narrative subject has a personal narrative and a nonpersonal narrative. Narrative techniques include narrative structure and spatial narrative lens (Chen, 2022).

In studying public service advertising, scholars have also conducted extensive research on semiotics. Semiotics, also known as "semiotics science", is an essential tool in media and cultural research and is a deep-seated ideological critique in imagery and other texts (Barker, 2004). The signifier of a symbol refers to a specific object, while the signified refers to the meaning behind the object (Faizan, 2019). The advertising content includes "signifier" and "signified". In addition to disseminating information, advertising can also reflect the profound connotations and cultural value of advertising. This distinction provides a theoretical framework for advertising to explain how it affects information recipients. Semiotics is interpreting visual communication through understanding textual mechanisms and

functions used to study how symbols generate meaning (Hoy, 2002). Semiotic text analysis can reveal the deep cultural and ideological structures in public service advertising. Moreover, in the context of cross-border cultural dissemination, semiotic theory helps to understand the audience's interpretation and acceptance of public service advertising information in different cultural contexts. Through analysis, it can be found that semiotics can enhance the influence and effectiveness of Thai public service advertising among audiences.

Past research on Thai public service advertising has mainly focused on its creativity and narrative methods. There has still been little research on its semiotic elements and profound cultural and social significance. The lack of this research prevents a comprehensive understanding of Thai public service advertising and also overlooks the rich symbols and cultural connotations contained in advertising. Thus, this biased research perspective leads to a superficial and one-sided interpretation of the meaning of public service advertising, one that ignores the profound role and influence of advertising in the social context. Therefore, this study selects Thai public service advertising as the research subject, and through semiotic theory, deeply analyses the impact and role of symbolic elements within it on advertising narrative, advertising communication effects, and other aspects. Further, this study explores the deep factors that cause wide audiences to recognize Thai public service advertising, and based on this, provides inspiration and suggestions for the production and dissemination of public service advertising in China.

3. Method

This study uses the research method of collecting typical cases to study the dissemination and effectiveness of Thai public service advertisements that have spread into China. The research samples are all Thai public service video advertisements which audiences love due to their creativity and emotional appeal. The videos selected have won international awards for their high quality and influence. Moreover, video as a medium is suitable for displaying advertising semiotics theory, as it can contain more information than other forms of advertising, relies more on various symbols to display meaning, and values narrative structure and plot (Lv, 2022).

This study empirically investigates public service advertising through data analysis. Bilibili is a popular website among young people in China,

the leading group on the internet. According to researchers, Bilibili has a relatively large video coverage, which includes almost all public service advertising worldwide. In a 2022 analysis report released by Bilibili, the proportion of young and willing consumers on Bilibili was reported at over 75 per cent, and the proportion of highly educated individuals was 10 per cent higher than the average level of the entire network (Bilibili, 2023). The target audience of Chinese public service advertising is young people, who spend most of their time browsing information online (Livingstone, Bober, & Helsper, 2005).

Young people receive information quickly, create content, and share information on social media platforms. They have a high sensitivity to fashion and social issues. When they identify with a particular social concept, they may become disseminators, further expanding the influence of public service advertising. Furthermore, compared to the previous generation, young people are more receptive to new ideas and information. Through public service advertising, it is easier to influence them and cultivate a sense of social responsibility among young people. This study chooses Bilibili's data as the primary reference for the above reasons.

Similarities in the cultural and historical backgrounds of Asian countries result in similarities between the expression of public service advertising and the public response as compared to non-Asian countries, providing a more consistent and comparable basis for this study. In choosing Thailand specifically, the methodology applied was as follows: Firstly, by conducting keyword searches on Bilibili, a leading video platform in China, we searched for playback data of public service advertising in more developed Asian countries such as Thailand. The results showed that a search using "Thai public service advertising" as the keywords yielded advertisements that reached 890,000 views, far exceeding the views of public service advertising from other countries, such as Singapore, Japan, and South Korea, which had at most 38,000, 11,000 and 63,000 views, respectively. On Weibo in China, the reading volume of the topic "Thai public service advertising" reached 1.443 million, again far exceeding other Asian countries, using search terms such as "Singapore public service advertising", "Japan public service advertising" and "South Korea public service advertising" which yielded reading volumes of 1,348, 282,000 and 29,000 respectively. In addition, a literature search for corresponding keywords was conducted on CNKI. The number of articles related to "Thai public service advertising" reached 38,

which also exceeded the number of articles in other Asian countries, such as Singapore, Japan, and South Korea, where the number of articles on public service advertising was 2, 13, and 29, respectively. This indicates that the Chinese audience and academic community have paid great attention to Thai public service advertising in China.

This study selected 2015 to 2022 as the research interval to ensure the typicality and representativeness of the research sample. Since 2015, Thai public service advertising has attracted widespread attention in China and demonstrated its unique charm and influence (Jiang, 2021). This study mainly focuses on the playback volume and interaction data of Thai public service advertising on the Bilibili platform. Generally speaking, Thai public service advertising with relatively high views generates more user behaviour data such as likes, comments, and shares. Therefore, this study only collected data on Thai public service advertising with views exceeding 10,000. Eight indicators were identified when establishing an analysis framework using the case analysis method. This article conducts an in-depth analysis of Thai public service advertising by collecting and observing these data (See Table 1). The primary advertising information collected are the advertisement name, advertiser, theme, and length, providing a fundamental description for the research. Secondly, metrics such as views, likes, shares, and comments reflect the audience’s acceptance and influence of advertising, making them an useful way to evaluate advertising effectiveness (Fedotova, 2023).

Table 1. Collection Table of Typical Cases of Thai Public Service Advertising

No	Advertising Name	Advertisers	Advertising Theme	Advertising Length	Playback Volume	Like Count	No. of Forwards	No. of Comments
1	Violent Landlady	7-11	Preventing Online Compliance	5:11	807,000	49,000	3,499	1,483
2	Unknown Hero	Thai Life Insurance	Molar	3:04	390,000	15,000	3,422	381
3	Environmental Challenges	Bar b. Q Plaza	Environment Protection	3:01	713,000	71,000	1,189	434
4	If you give me a bill and make me give up on you	7-11	School Education	8:40	510,000	14,000	6,132	981
5	My father is a scaffold	Metlife	Fatherly Love	3:27	272,000	11,000	5,664	230

No	Advertising Name	Advertisers	Advertising Theme	Advertising Length	Playback Volume	Like Count	No. of Forwards	No. of Comments
6	A little girl who cannot be locked down	Kleenex Issue (USA)	Motivation	6:33	262,000	6,238	1,567	248
7	A bowl of Egg Fried Rice	CP Food	Home Education	2:52	228,000	7,774	3,613	232
8	My Blind Teacher	7-11	Education	10:43	215,000	5,826	1,813	315
9	Beggar's Graduation	Vizer Camera	Gratitude	5:29	174,000	5,699	197	324
10	Death is not the end but another continuation	7-11	Education	9:27	170,000	289	1,518	251
11	Try a little harder	Nestle Coffee	Home Education	4:27	97,000	1,395	1,690	52
12	Giving is the best way to communicate.	True Communication	Molar	2:58	88,000	9,796	196	353
13	Son, how long will you stay when you come back this time?	Five Star Roasted Chicken	Family Affection, Companionship	4:48	67,000	2,858	526	145
14	If I were a girl	Sunsilk Shampoo	Transgender Beauty Pageants, Marginalized Individuals	4:02	65,000	1,599	378	82
15	Pineapple Popsicle	AIS Communication	Home Education	2:28	64,000	3,153	380	176
16	What value does graduation have for you?	CP	Filial Piety	6:30	46,000	1,450	1,206	91
17	Children don't need the best dad	Thai Insurance	Family Love	3:01	25,000	339	332	14
18	Auditory Child	7-11 Supermarket	Education	11:17	21,000	929	159	65
19	Dreams triggered by bean sprouts	AIS Communication	Home Education	3:00	17,000	188	795	14
20	Gratitude Dog	Kiatnakin Bank	Repay Kindness	2:27	59,000	217	28	33

In addition, this study sorted out relevant literature on public service advertising audiences, communication effects, and semiotics both domestically and internationally and compiled a semi-structured interview outline. Then, using sampling survey methods, the interviewees were determined. Among the 12 selected interviewees, six are from Thailand, and

six are from China. This includes senior advertising scholars and core staff of advertising companies.

This study defines senior advertising scholars as those who have published significant research results on public service advertising in the academic community. In contrast, the core staff of advertising companies refers to individuals who participate in critical decision-making and creative development in advertising companies. The criteria for selecting interviewees considered a professional background in public service advertising and at least five years of rich research or practical experience in public service advertising. This study sought people of these background to capture in-depth and multi-perspective insights, and help ensure the research's depth and breadth. The interview covered the characteristics, strategies, audience insights, dissemination effects, and interpretation of success factors of Thai public service advertising, as well as the differences between Thai and Chinese public service advertising. The code table for interviewees is as follows:

Table 2. Interviewee Editing Information

Interviewee	No. of Interviewees	Interviewee Code
Chinese Advertising Scholars	3	A01, A02, A03
Chinese Advertising Companies Core staff	3	B01, B02, B03
Thai Advertising Scholar	3	C01, C02, C03
Thai Advertising Company Core Staff	3	D01, D02, D03

4. Results

Advertising is a symbol system composed of many individual symbols, an effective means of communication with profound cultural connotations and meanings (Yildirim, 2021). Video advertising is composed of visual and auditory symbols. According to the high and low-context culture proposed by American anthropologist Hoy (2002), Thailand is classified as a high-context country. This means that in disseminating Thai public service advertising, in addition to language symbols, it also relies on symbols such as character performance, body language, intonation, and facial expressions for audiences to understand the conveyed meaning. Therefore, this study mainly analyses the symbol application of Thai public service advertising from two dimensions: visual symbols and auditory symbols (See Table 3),

allowing for a corollary analysis of information dissemination and emotional expression of advertising in depth. By comprehensively utilizing visual and auditory symbols, one can fully use the advantages of audiovisual media to create advertising works that are infectious and emotionally expressive.

Table 3. Classification of Typical Public Service Advertising Symbols in Thailand

Symbol Category	Specific Symbols
Visual Symbols	1 Text Symbols: Advertising Slogans, Advertising Subtitles
	2 Character Symbols: Landlady, Teacher, Student, Vendor, Mother, Children, Coach, Transgender Person
	3 Scene Symbols: Life Scenes, Educational Scenes, Sports Scenes, Digital/Technological Scenes
Auditory Symbols	Monologues, Dialogues, Voiceovers, Sound Effects

4.1 Revealing Visual Symbols in Thai Public Service Advertising

Visual symbols refer to symbols, information, or meanings conveyed through visual elements (Fontana, 2003), which are essential factors in advertisement communication or attracting audience attention. It is an abstract concept based on graphical images and a unique concept of visual elements such as images or videos (Mühlenbeck, 2020). Graphic symbols in Thai public service advertising, predominantly textual, character, and scene symbols, often go beyond surface meaning and contain deep communication of cultural and social concepts.

4.1.1 Life-Oriented Textual Symbols

In the field of semiotics, writing is an important symbol. Although text appears relatively infrequently in advertising, it is an essential component of visual symbols in advertising. Moreover, as mentioned by interviewee C03 in their in-depth interview, the textual symbols used in Thai public service advertising are easy to understand by the general public. The text symbol in “Dreams Triggered by Bean Sprouts” is an example. After repeated challenges and failures, the mother still says, “Let’s try” to her child. At the end of the advertisement, the theme or slogan of the advertising is displayed: “Mother’s encouragement makes children full of confidence,” introducing sincere and encouraging suggestions through every day and plain language.

Thai public service advertising slogans are usually displayed at the end, accompanied by the company or brand’s logo, playing a role in elevating

the theme. It is a brief expression of brand information and reflects brand culture (N. C. M. Liu, 2015). Public service advertising mainly spreads to the audience through audiovisual language. It creates emotional resonance, and even changes one’s attitude and behaviour. Written symbols are more persuasive and essential to audiovisual language (F. Yu, 2003). In the advertisement comments, netizens’ showcase the changes in their cognition and attitude towards Thai public service advertising (see Table 4).

Table 4. Text Symbol Analysis Table for Typical Cases of Thai Public Service Advertising

Advertising Name	Text Symbols	Displayed Information	Display of Comments from Netizens
A Bowl of Egg Fried Rice	Remember to take care of every bite of your food	The daughter recalls her mother’s love for herself, reflecting the greatness of maternal love.	“We always feel grateful to the person who gave us a bowl of rice, but we are overly harsh on the person who has been in charge of our food for over a decade.”
Unknown Hero	Believe in doing good deeds	The protagonist silently does good deeds, reflecting his self-worth.	“Giving is happier than receiving.”
Violent Landlady	Don’t judge others solely based on the side of the story you see; create a better society with an open heart.	Advocate for people to understand the whole picture of things and approach things with a more inclusive heart.	“I won’t comment on the whole picture of an unknown matter, but the most difficult thing is to know if what I know is the whole picture, so don’t easily judge others.”
Make a Little Effort.	Defeat yourself and make a little progress every day	Advocate a positive and upward attitude towards life.	“Effort always pays off!”
Dream Triggered by Bean Sprouts	Family education stimulates the infinite potential of learning	Emphasize the importance of parents teaching by example.	“Mother’s encouragement makes children full of confidence!”

4.1.2 Civilized Character Symbols

In the visual symbols of public service advertising, characters are the main constituent factor conducive to the advertising’s narrative presentation and emotional expression (Dessart, 2018). They promote the development of advertising narratives and strengthen the dissemination of emotions.

The character symbols in Thai public service advertising are superficial social roles and represent a particular class's social groups, cultural concepts, and social values (see Table 5). Character symbols include commoners, ordinary people, identities such as street vendors, shop owners, mothers, children, teachers, and some vulnerable groups such as beggars, poor people, and impoverished students. By focusing on these vulnerable groups, they can evoke sympathy and support from the public.

The selection of character symbols in Thai public service advertising is essential to their success. In an in-depth interview, interviewee A01 mentioned that "the selection of civilian characters in Thai public service advertisements and natural performances by non-professional actors allow audiences to emotionally resonate after watching." There are also unique character symbols, such as transgender individuals and autistic children. The advertisement "If I Were a Girl" tells the story of the protagonist (Tiffany, the runner-up of the 2017 Transgender Beauty pageant), who has been pursuing feminine beauty since childhood. When she reached university, she finally achieved her dream and became a transgender person. The advertising reflects their actual social reality. During the process of the protagonist becoming a transgender person, she encounters misunderstandings from her family. Ultimately, she finally receives her father's understanding and encouragement to fulfil her dream. The advertisement "Autistic Children and Teachers" tells the story of a teacher helping an autistic child learn through love and patience. This type of advertising provides social care for special character symbols.

In this case, as a character symbol, the teacher represents the teacher community and signifies Thailand's respect for knowledge and morality. These advertisements showcase the role of teachers both inside and outside the classroom, not only imparting knowledge but guiding students to learn how to be good people, reflecting the multiple symbolic meanings of teachers. For example, in the public service advertisement, "Death Is Not the End, but Another Continuation," the role of a teacher goes beyond traditional teacher responsibilities and becomes a guide for students' emotions and morals. This expression not only expresses teachers' love for their selfless dedication to students but also reflects the expectations and respect of the Thai nation towards teachers. In addition, the scene of the Teacher Worship Festival further strengthens the cultural and social significance of teacher character symbols, and students kneel and bow to teachers, reflecting

Thailand’s tradition of respecting teachers and valuing education (Bunwirat & Crocco, 2019).

Table 5. Figure Symbol Analysis Table for Typical Cases of Thai Public Service Advertising

Advertising Cases	Character Symbols	Advertising Content Display	Cultural Symbols
Violent Landlady	Landlady	A reversal plot where the surface is fierce but kind.	Thailand’s culture of compassion and helping others.
If Give Me One Billion to Give Up You	Principal	Resist the temptation of wealth and persist in running schools.	Thailand values education and the selfless dedication of educators.
Pineapple Popsicle and Dreams Triggered by Bean Sprouts	Mother	Strive for self-improvement in adversity and have a positive impact on children.	Emphasize the values of family education.
Unknown Hero	Worker	Be kind and generous, even if the economy is not prosperous, willing to help others.	The benevolence and generosity in Buddhist culture.

4.1.3 Scene Symbols with Local Characteristics

Scene symbols are visual symbols that are essential background for storytelling. In a particular social and cultural context, a specific scene is given a specific meaning, and this “scene” becomes a “symbol” (Wu, 2019).

In the in-depth interview, interviewee A03 mentioned that “Thai public service advertising is easy to understand; even if you don’t understand Thai, you can understand the content of the advertising through scenes and non-verbal symbols.” This highlights that in Thai public service advertising, the selection and application of symbols can enhance the overall communication effect of the advertising. In Thai public service advertisements, scene symbols often comprise life scenes or natural scenes, which are closely related to daily life and have specific social significance, providing a social background for advertising narration. This scene can be divided into several categories: life, educational, sports, and digital/technological.

Firstly, life scenes are the foundation of Thai society. For example, the scene symbols displayed in “Pineapple Popsicle” include low-income family environments, noisy markets, snack stalls, traditional cross-legged dining

tables, etc., reflecting daily life and Thai society's elemental composition and cultural characteristics. As mentioned by interviewee C03, scenes in Thai public service advertisements usually are places with Thai characteristics. Moreover, these scenes showcase the attitudes of Thai society towards poverty, family, and life wisdom by showcasing families' economic situation and lifestyle. The advertising conveys to the audience that even with limited living conditions, success can still be achieved through hard work. The scene symbols reveal Thai society's importance placed on and emotions about effort, wisdom, family, and maternal love (Buriyameathagul, 2013).

Secondly, educational scenes include schools and classrooms, while sports scenes include football fields, playgrounds, etc., which also carry critical symbolic meanings. The scenes such as school, football field, and home in "A Little Effort" not only serve as crucial stages for the growth of young boys but also imply that education and sports are the keys to their growth. These scenes are not only physical environments but also symbols of children's learning, growth, and realizing their dreams. Through these scenes, the critical value of hard work and family support in personal growth in Thai culture is conveyed (Deveney, 2005).

Similarly, social media and violent scenes, as shown in the advertising "Violent Landlady", remind people of the influence of public opinion and the importance of information authenticity in the information society. These scenes also reflect Thai society's reflection on the information age and contemplation on online morality (Guzzetti, 2015).

Thai public service advertising scenes are realistic, natural, and down-to-earth, hence manage to convince people. In the in-depth interview, interviewee D01 also mentioned, "Due to Thailand's economic strength, there won't be too much budget to produce advertising, but the most authentic side will be presented in the advertising, such as the scenes of the lower-level personnel in 'Unknown Hero'."

4.2 Analysis of Auditory Symbols in Thai Public Service Advertising

Sound is also a way of disseminating information, playing a promoting role in expressing emotions and plot development. The auditory symbols in film and television advertising refer to all the sound elements that can be heard in the advertisement (Pirhonen & McAllister, 2006). They have a wide range, including monologue, dialogue, narration, sound effects, background music,

etc. Tavassoli and Lee (2003) argue that “the addition of auditory elements can complement visual factors and work together with the sensory system to promote the expression of plot.” Auditory and visual symbols construct the narrative structure of an advertisement, which strengthens the ideas and emotions expressed. Auditory symbols can compensate for the shortcomings of film and television images, ensure the completeness of the narrative, enhance the content of advertising stories and promote the development of the plot (Liao, 2010). As stated by S. Li (2007), whether it is monologues, dialogues, or background music, they are indispensable tools in film and television. They can convey the ideas of characters, save production costs, and accurately disseminate information.

4.2.1 The Role of Dialogue in Shaping Characters

Dialogue is the conversation between two or more actors (Fedotova, 2023) speaking in an advertising scene. In the advertising “If I Give Up You One Billion”, a combination of the female principal’s self-narration and dialogue from other characters showcases a student-centred and resilient teacher image. The auditory symbols here emphasize educators’ dedication to education and reflect Thai society’s respect towards educators.

The primary function of dialogue is to express the characters’ thoughts, emotions, and personality traits in advertising, thereby promoting the development of the story plot. For example, the advertising “Dreams Triggered by Bean Sprouts” showcases a girl’s encouragement and support from her mother through auditory symbols in dialogue, thus striving to achieve her dreams. Similarly, in the advertising “Strive a Little”, the character dialogue also showcases the little boy’s mother not giving up, encouraging him to “improve a little bit every day”. With his mother’s encouragement, the boy was greatly encouraged and persisted in training, ultimately achieving good results (see Table 6).

**Table 6. Dialogue of Characters in Thai Public Service advertising
“Make a Little Effort”**

Character	Character Dialogue	Scene
Mom	Coach, how did M perform?	Football Stadium Reception Hall
	M? Oh, he showed great determination.	
	But his foundation is not very good.	
Coach	His heading technique is basically zero.	
	Let’s observe more days, shall we?	
	Sorry.	
	I talked to your coach today.	Home
	He said you have been working hard all along.	
Mom	Before that, you wouldn’t even know how to use your head to head the ball.	
	But you can do it now and then.	
	Try a little harder.	
	Just a little touch is enough.	
Mom	Does it hurt?	Football field
Son	I can’t catch up with others.	Football field
	It’s okay	
Mom	Just strive to surpass the person right in front of you.	Football field
	Just a little bit is enough.	

4.2.2 The Expressive Role of Monologues in Advertising

Inner monologue refers to an actor expressing their inner thoughts in a self-explanatory manner (Frobenius, 2014), and in advertising, monologues often blend with the visuals. For example, in the advertising “Strive a Little”, the mother’s inner monologue not only provides the audience with background information about the protagonist’s son practicing ball, it allows the audience to understand the mother’s thoughts, saves narrative time, and also shows the audience the image of a mother who pays for the child and cares about his growth. It promotes the development of the story plot, and shapes the character image of a persistent mother and a son who strives for progress (see Table 7).

Table 7. Inner Monologues of Characters in Thai Public Service Advertising “Strive a Little”

Characters	Inner Monologue	Scene
Mom	Am I the worst mom in history?	Football field
	Am I telling him a lie?	Home
	Am I harming him?	
	I may not be the best mother.	
	I don’t want my child to always get first place.	Football field
	I just hope he can surpass me every day.	
	Just a little by myself.	

4.2.3 *The Role of Narration in Advertising Narrative*

Voiceover adds richness and depth to the narrative of advertising. As a frequently used narrative technique in public service advertising, it often manifests as a first-person “self-narration” or a third-person narration of a story or event (Niroula, 2023), adding emotion and depth to advertising. Moreover, adding voiceovers gives people a visual sense of dialogue with the audience, achieving good communication between the advertising and the audience (Medrado, Ferreira, & Behlau, 2005).

The advertising for “Unknown Hero” uses auditory symbols to highlight the advertising theme: believing in kindness through narration. The narration conveys profound life philosophy and emphasizes the different pursuits of material and spiritual pursuits, resonating with the audience (see Table 8).

Table 8. Voiceover for the Public Service Advertising “Unknown Hero”

Lens	Voiceover
The protagonist quietly leaves after delivering bananas to the elderly lady who lives alone, and the old lady opens the door.	What will he gain if he does it every day?
The protagonist eats, feeds chickens, worships Buddha, and waters flowers at home.	He didn’t gain anything, didn’t become wealthier, didn’t appear on TV, and still remained nameless.
The flowers on the street, with his help, bloomed new flowers. He helped the street vendor push the cart and helped him wear a hat.	It hasn’t become more famous either.
The protagonist was moved to tears when he saw the sponsored little girl successfully enrolling in school.	Because what he gains is emotions.
The protagonist smiled on his face after giving the puppy chicken legs.	Seeing happiness.

Lens	Voiceover
The protagonist is eating bananas at home.	Can understand.
The old lady who gave bananas to the protagonist took the initiative to hug him.	Get love.
The master princess moved the smiling faces of the elder sister, who gave up her seat and the beggar who received his support.	Get things that money cannot buy.
Watered plants bloom beautiful flowers. The begging daughter teaches her mother knowledge.	Get a more beautiful world.
Butterflies perched on flowers. Beautiful sunset scenery.	What is your greatest pursuit in life?
The logo of Thai life insurance	Believe in doing good deeds.

4.2.4 The Role of Sound Effects in Character Development

Sound effects can render the atmosphere of the camera and enhance realism (Mott, 2014). For example, in the advertisement “A Bowl of Egg Fried Rice,” the sound effects and symbols of fried rice and the proprietress of the snack stand make the girl who runs away from home feel warm at home and remind her of her mother’s preparation of three meals for herself year after year. In the advertisement “Violent Landlady,” various auditory symbols such as a dog barking and falling scales add a tense atmosphere to the advertising. The use of sound makes the advertisement more realistic, promotes the development of the plot, and allows the audience to better empathize with the landlady, understand her inner goodness and the virtue of helping others, and promote the audience to re-interpret this character (see Table 9).

Table 9. Sound Effects of Public Service Advertising “Violent Landlady”

Lens	Sound Object	Sound Effects
Car driving into the camera (from afar)	Car audio system	Whoosh
Boss and subordinates (close-up)	Automobile	Brake
Boss getting out of the car (close shot)	Automobile	Bang
Dogs in the Market (Panorama)	Dog	Wang
The sound of a vendor opening coconuts (close shot)	Knife opening a coconut	Pup
The sound of the boss lady throwing the scale (far view)	The scale falling to the ground	Pa Pa
The sound of netizens typing (close shot)	Keyboard	Pi Li Pa La

4.3 Thai Public Service Advertising Symbol Strategy and its Effect Analysis

4.3.1 The Role of Symbol Application in Thai Public Service Advertising

The positive impact of using symbols in advertising is that it enhances the effectiveness of advertising (Gentry & Holland, 1997). Research has shown that consumers or the public exhibit higher efficiency in recognizing and recalling certain symbols (Moazzam, 1967). Based on Robins (1971) contextual theory, it can be inferred that symbols in Thai public service advertising are not only simple images, text, and sound but also relate to specific cultural and linguistic contexts. As a country with a rich cultural heritage, the symbols in Thailand's public service advertising often contain the characteristics of Thailand's own culture, such as Buddhist culture, traditional festivals, moral concepts, etc.

The content of Thai public service advertising is not only related to the country's society and culture but also spreads universal values and social issues of concern to the public to evoke emotional resonance among the audience during dissemination. The narrative technique of Thai public service advertising often uses familiar visual and auditory symbols, using civilians as the protagonists and spreading public service concepts through story-based advertising. It is plain and natural, with delicate narrative techniques, and is skilled in using auditory symbols such as narration to provide emotional connections between advertising and audiences. This also suggests that Chinese public service advertising creators should deeply explore their cultural elements in content creation, combine universal values such as being kind to others and receiving good rewards, and use emotional narrative methods to strengthen the connection between advertising and audiences, thereby improving the persuasiveness and influence of public service advertising.

4.3.2 Factors Influencing the Successful Dissemination of Thai Public Service Advertising in China

The successful dissemination of Thai public service advertising in China may also be caused by similar social and cultural factors in the two countries. For example, China advocates "valuing peace", which is highly respected in Thailand and deeply influenced by Buddhist culture. Both countries attach great importance to respecting teachers and value morality, filial piety, truth, goodness, beauty, social responsibility, and altruistic

thinking for the sake of others (Shang, 2023). The creation of public service advertising is influenced by social culture and values, and it is precisely these similar cultural foundations that contribute to the further popularization of Thai public service advertising in China.

In disseminating public service advertisements, symbols can evoke emotional resonance among the audience and cross the boundaries of different countries. This study explores how to optimize Chinese public service advertising through the use of symbols so that it can have better dissemination effects on Chinese media platforms. Especially considering the cultural differences and similarities between China and Thailand, it is worth learning how to use symbols appropriately to achieve better communication effects.

4.3.3 The Cross-Border Communication Effect of Symbolized Application of Thai Public Service Advertising in China

O'Keefe and Reid (2020) believe that the effectiveness of public service advertising can be evaluated by its impact on the audience. Based on the audience's response, the effectiveness of public service advertising can be divided into three levels: cognition, attitude, and behaviour. Thus, in this section, we will analyse the dissemination effect of Thai public service advertisements in China and study the impact of public service advertising from three dimensions: cognitive effect, attitude effect, and behavioural effect.

Cognitive effects focus on the audience's understanding of advertising content, attitude effects evaluate the audience's perception of advertising content, and behavioural effects focus on the potential impact of advertising on audience behaviour. By qualitatively and quantitatively analysing comments on Bilibili from the chosen cases of Thai public service advertisements, in addition to using a questionnaire survey, feedback from the audience was obtained, and the advertising effectiveness was systematically evaluated.

The questionnaire design of this study includes not only essential individual items but also questionnaire measurement items to measure the audience's awareness, attitude, and behavioural effects towards Thai public service advertising. There are a total of 15 questions, using the Lister 5-point scale, with 1-5 representing "strongly disagree" "disagree" "average" "agree" and "strongly agree". After the questionnaire design was completed,

three experts and scholars in advertising were invited for evaluation to ensure the professionalism and accuracy of the content. These experts and scholars have rich research achievements in advertising, high academic standing, and rich knowledge and practical experience in advertising research methods. After their scrutiny, the survey author made modifications and improvements based on their suggestions.

Because the test subjects of the questionnaire are college students, this study adopted a comprehensive sample selection strategy to cover different cognitive perspectives. College students from different regions were selected, with ten students from each city. Considering the vast geographical area of China, six cities were chosen, resulting in a total sample size of 60 students. Additionally, four categories of disciplines were invited to cover the academic backgrounds of different disciplines, including literature and art, social sciences (including advertising), natural sciences, and applied sciences, with ten students selected from each field. Altogether, based on these criteria, about 100 college students were invited to conduct a preliminary survey to ensure the diversity and breadth of the sample, covering a more comprehensive range of viewpoints and cognitive differences. The survey content was modified and improved through testing and feedback. Finally, a formal survey questionnaire was determined to ensure the effectiveness and reliability of subsequent surveys.

After the questionnaire design and pre-survey processes were completed, the formal data collection process began. The data was collected through the online professional questionnaire survey website “Wenjuan.com”, which then forwarded the links and QR codes to social media such as WeChat and QQ. The official questionnaire data was collected from September 26, 2023, to November 10, 2023, with 541 questionnaires collected. After removing nine invalid samples, 532 questionnaires were collected, with a response rate of 98 per cent.

Next, a detailed statistical analysis was conducted on the data from the valid samples. The basic statistics of the effective samples are as follows: (1) 172 males, accounting for 32.3 per cent of respondents; 360 women, accounting for 67.7 per cent of respondents. (2) Most respondents (502) were young people aged 18-24, accounting for 94.4 per cent. (3) The education level was primarily undergraduate, with a total of 442 people, accounting for 83.1 per cent; 46 college students, accounting for 8.6 per cent; 41 people with a Master’s degree or above, accounting for 7.7 per cent. (4) Major:

79 people were majoring in advertising, accounting for 15 per cent; 453 students were from non-advertising majors, accounting for 85 per cent.

This survey focused on the views and reactions of young college students toward Thai public service advertising. Therefore, an attitude scale was designed, divided into three dimensions: cognitive, attitude, and behavioural effects. We specifically explored issues such as “the level of love for Thai public service advertising”, “the impact of Thai public service advertising on concepts and values”, “after watching public service advertising, it stimulates the audience’s inner truth, goodness, and beauty”, and “after watching public service advertising, it triggers a sense of responsibility”. After analysis, the reliability of this scale was a good 0.821.

(1) Cognitive Effect Analysis

There is a larger audience of young people with a higher level of acceptance and exploration of things at Bilibili. In addition, Thai public service advertising has high creativity and novelty, with high viewership, which makes them more likely to attract the attention of young people. Moreover, high-volume advertising is more likely to engage young audiences in discussions, thereby deepening the cognitive effects of advertising.

Of the three levels of advertising effectiveness, cognitive effectiveness is the first level achieved by advertising (Mehta, 2000). Cognitive effects focus on the audience’s perception and understanding of advertising information, including awareness, information, etc. (Olson, 1982). By analysing the comments on typical Thai public service advertising, we can understand the audience’s interpretation of public service advertising, and explore whether the advertising has successfully disseminated information, i.e. whether the audience has received the information conveyed in the advertising and learned new knowledge.

For example, public service advertisements such as “Giving is the Best Way to Communicate” and “Unknown Hero” generated enthusiastic discussion among netizens. A netizen mentioned their previous blood donation experience in a comment that resonated emotionally with the saying, “Giving is the Best Way to Communicate.” Another netizen expressed that every time he watched “Unknown Hero”, it moved him deeply. The advertisement successfully conveyed the message of love and dedication.

We further explored the awareness of Thai public service advertising in China through in-depth interviews. The respondents had a very similar view,

believing that Thai public service advertising attracts audience attention due to its exquisite narrative, warm stories, and touching character symbols. For example, interviewee B02 said, “Regarding dissemination effectiveness, there is no doubt that both Chinese people are talking about Thai advertising. Which country will achieve this? This has crossed national borders. The original target audience of Thai public service advertising was already willing to watch these advertising actively, and the impact on the audience is far-reaching. The effect of telling stories and slowly penetrating various values into the audience is very good.”

According to our survey data, 98.3 per cent of respondents reported having seen Thai public service advertising, which further proves the high awareness of Thai public service advertising in China, indicating that Thai public service advertising has been widely spread in China in recent years. According to the data, the audience watches these advertisements on TikTok, Bilibili, Weibo and other media platforms. This reflects the situation of young Chinese audiences using media platforms primarily and also means that these media platforms have played an essential role in promoting the dissemination of public service advertising in Thailand. It can be seen that the choice of media may also affect the audience’s acceptance and the effectiveness of an advertisement’s dissemination.

From the results of the questionnaire survey, among the 20 typical Thai public service advertising cases, the most popular one is “Violent Landlady”; the second and third are “Unknown Hero” and “A Bowl of Egg Fried Rice”, respectively. The number of votes for “What Value Gratitude Has for You” is 50, accounting for only 9.4 per cent, the lowest proportion indicating that the emotional resonance with the audience is not high. It can be seen that the popularity of each advertisement varies based on a combination of factors such as playback volume. It may also be related to the advertising content and target audience. In addition, other factors may affect the effectiveness of its dissemination, such as duration, themes, etc. Due to space limitations, these potential factors have not been further explored in this article.

When evaluating the cognitive effect of Thai public service advertising, “What is your overall impression of Thai public service advertising?” was used as an indicator for measurement. Through descriptive statistics of the data, the mean was 4.20 (see Table 10), indicating that the audience’s overall impression of Thai public service advertising is very good, i.e. that the audience widely recognizes the content of Thai public service advertising and

gives it a good evaluation. The positive evaluation may be due to the unique symbolic expression and narrative style of Thai public service advertising, which captivates the audience. Moreover, Thai public service advertisements resonate with the audience with its solid emotional elements. In addition, in terms of themes, paying attention to social hot issues can create a resonance between advertising content and the audience's sense of responsibility.

Table 10. Statistical Table of Questionnaire Survey Description

	N	Minimum Value	Maximum Value	Mean Value	Standard Deviation
Q7 What is your overall impression of Thai public service advertising?	532	2	5	4.20	0.682
Q9 How much do you agree with my view that I like Thai public service advertising?	532	1	5	3.75	0.855
Q10 Does Thai public service advertising have an impact on your beliefs and values?	532	1	5	3.8698	0.69022
Q11 How much do you agree with the idea that Thai public service advertising is creative?	532	1	5	4.02	0.786
Q12 Thai public service advertising can inspire my inner truth, goodness, and beauty.	532	1	5	3.7970	0.72885
Q13 Thai public service advertising can evoke a sense of responsibility in my heart.	532	1	5	3.82	0.743
Valid N (list status)	532				

(2) Attitude Effect Analysis

The attitude effect refers to the audience's inner evaluation and psychological and emotional response to a specific dissemination of information after receiving it, as well as the possible changes in viewpoints or emotions that may arise (Nicolas Hamelin 2017).

The attitude effect is also significant in advertising communication. Thai public service advertising has gained love from audiences on Chinese video websites and has left a deep impression. Most audiences express their passion for the advertisement content and actively share their opinions in the comment section. The comments show that most of the audience's

acceptance and liking of Thai public service advertising reflects their identification with the advertising. Through analysis, it can be concluded that the reasons why audiences like Thai public service advertising include creativity, production quality, and the positive values conveyed.

The comments on the advertisement “Unknown Hero” sparked praise from netizens, who have said “Thai advertising is great” and “Thai advertising is heartwarming”. In the advertisement “A Bowl of Egg Fried Rice”, netizens commented: “I heard from my teacher that all Thai TV stations are better looking at advertising than TV dramas, so the advertising is very long, and the audience will have no objection.” In the advertisement “Dreams Caused by Bean Sprouts”, a netizen commented, “This story is a real story, it’s really good. It demonstrates the power of family education, making such a story into advertising for everyone to benefit together. We should also learn from this example.” In the advertisement review, it can be seen that the advertisement triggers the audience’s thinking and generates positive emotional feedback. For some audiences, the content in the advertising resonates emotionally with their actual experiences, leading them to develop new perspectives on specific aspects of life.

Our questionnaire survey also confirmed the popularity of Thai public service advertising among Chinese audiences. When asked, “What is your overall impression of Thai public service advertising?” up to 85.6 per cent of respondents gave positive feedback. In the option “Your level of agreement with the viewpoint of ‘I like Thai public service advertising’”, 64.5 per cent of the survey respondents expressed liking Thai public service advertising. These data demonstrate that most respondents are positive toward Thai public service advertising.

In the in-depth interviews, the respondents generally held similar views and highly evaluated the dissemination effect of Thai public service advertising in China, especially their clever narrative techniques, attractive storylines, and thought-provoking civilian character images. For example, interviewee A01 mentioned, “The dissemination effect of Thai public service advertising is very good. I often search for Thai video public service advertising online when preparing for classes. I noticed that these advertisements’ comment areas are full of praise, and many netizens expressed envy for Thailand’s ability to produce such excellent public service advertising. I have also used Thai public service advertising in the classroom as teaching materials multiple times.”

In terms of evaluating the attitude and effectiveness of Chinese audiences towards Thai public service advertising, we measured the degree of liking for Thai public service advertising and conducted descriptive statistics on the data, with a mean of 3.75 (see Table 10), indicating that young audiences hold a relatively positive attitude towards the viewpoint of “I like Thai public service advertising”. This positive attitude may be due to the cultural similarities between China and Thailand and the unique creativity and narrative techniques of Thai public service advertising (Punyapiroje & Morrison, 2002). This score reflects the acceptance of Thai public service advertising by Chinese audiences and inspires the production of Chinese public service advertising.

The option “Your level of agreement with the idea of ‘Thailand’s public service advertising creativity is good’” achieved a mean of 4.02 (see Table 10). This indicates that most of the audience believes that Thai public service advertising has good creativity and also suggests a good fit between Thai advertising and the concepts of Chinese audiences, which subsequently provides positive feedback for the dissemination of Thai public service advertising in China. Usually, captivating narrative techniques are used, combined with emotionally resonant storylines, which provide a reference for developing public service advertising in China.

A cross-analysis was conducted on the two questions: “Your level of agreement with the idea that ‘Thai public service advertising is creative’” and “Please describe the specific actions you took after watching Thai public service advertising.” The chi-square test showed a P-value of 0.004, less than 0.05 (see Table 11). There is a clear correlation between the overall positive impression of Thai public service advertising and the specific actions the survey respondents plan to take after watching Thai public service advertising. This may mean that the creativity of Thai public service advertising has touched the audience, inspiring them to take specific practical actions, further demonstrating the close connection between the emotional response and behavioural effects of Thai public service advertising.

Table 11. Chi-Square Test Table for Options “Your Level of Agreement with the Idea that ‘Thai public Service Advertising are Creative’” and “Please Describe the Specific Actions You Took after Watching Thai Public Service Advertising”

	Value	Df	Progressive Sig (Bilateral)
Pearson Chi-Square	410.084 ^a	336	0.004
Likelihood Ratio	304.422	336	0.891
N in Valid Cases	532		

a. The expected count for cell 404 (95.1%) is less than 5. The minimum expected count is .01.

To further explore the effectiveness of Thai public service advertising in China, the research for this article breaks down acceptance and perception into two measurable indicators: audience impression of advertising and audience liking of advertising, measured across a Lister 5-level attitude scale on questions Q7 for “Overall impression of Thai public service advertising” and Q9 for “Liking Thai public service advertising” (1-5 representing “strongly disagree—strongly agree”). At the same time, this article examines the degree of advertising effectiveness achieved by Thai public service advertising, designing three relevant indicators: “Impact on audience views and values Q10”, “Inspiration of audience inner truth, goodness and beauty Q12”, and “Inspiration of audience social responsibility Q13”.

This study conducted chi-square tests on the relationships between Q7 and Q10 and Q9 and Q10. The results showed that the P-values were all 0, significantly lower than the 0.01 level. Different levels of audience perception of the overall impression of Thai public service advertising and their liking for it would lead to different advertising effects (varying degrees of influence on audience views and values). This indicates that the better the audience’s impression of Thai public service advertising, or the more the audience likes Thai public service advertising, the greater the impact on the audience’s views and values.

At the same time, this study conducted chi-square tests on the relationship between Q7 and Q12, Q13, and the relationship between Q9 and Q12, Q13. The results showed that the P-values were all $0 < 0.01$, indicating a significant relationship between the audience’s perception of Thai public service advertising and the stimulating effect of advertising on the audience’s truth, goodness, beauty, and social responsibility. The better the audience’s impression of Thai public service advertising, or the more

the audience likes Thai public service advertising, the higher the degree to which advertising stimulates the audience's inner truth, goodness, beauty, and social responsibility.

Through analysis, it can be found that the degree of influence on the audience's views and values is a mediating variable, which means that the audience's acceptance and perception of public service advertising may require some intermediary processes to ultimately stimulate the audience's inner truth, goodness, and beauty, and stimulate their sense of social responsibility. The audience's exposure and perception of Thai public service advertising will first affect their values. When values have a more profound impact, they may further stimulate their inner truth, goodness, and beauty, stimulating their sense of social responsibility (O'Shaughnessy, 2002).

(3) Analysis of Behavioural Effects

The goal of advertising is not only to disseminate information but, more importantly, to promote specific behavioural changes in the audience (Vakratsas & Ambler, 1999). Thai public service advertising often focuses on ordinary people, showcasing the principles of life through them. Their themes are primarily about transmitting truth, goodness, beauty, and positive energy. Studying the feedback of advertising audiences, such as comments on video website advertising, and exploring the strategic awareness behind Thai public service advertising is an effective method to understand advertising effectiveness. For example, some netizens said that after watching the advertisements "Violent Landlady" and "A Bowl of Egg Fried Rice", they had a new understanding of society's public opinion as well as their own relationships with their families, and prompted them to change and think about their willingness to act. For example, in the comment section of the advertisement "If I Were to Give Up You One Billion", a netizen suggested, "As a future teacher of the people, I hope I can also truly love education." Another netizen mentioned, "I graduated from a normal university this year and strive to become a good teacher in teaching and educating people." It is consistent with the message conveyed in the advertisement of love and respect for education, and is compatible with Bandura and Walters' (1977) social learning theory, which states that learning is achieved by observing the behaviour of others, also known as "observational learning".

On the aspect of behavioural effects of Thai public service advertising on Chinese audiences, this study evaluated the degree of agreement with the view that “watching Thai public service advertising can trigger a sense of social responsibility in my heart”. A score of 3.82 was obtained using descriptive statistical methods (see Table 10). Most of the audience believes that watching Thai public service advertising can evoke a sense of social responsibility. This score demonstrates the emotional and social appeal of Thai public service advertising, indicating that Thai public service advertising not only gains audience recognition in creativity but also achieves significant results in encouraging people to take on social responsibility. Behind this score is the deep reflection of Thai public service advertising on local culture and social values. It effectively conveys public service information through attractive storylines and audiovisual symbolic effects, arousing the audience’s sense of identification.

In terms of practical actions, our survey further reveals the actual impact. According to the survey, 51.3 per cent of respondents said they would share their favourite advertisements with friends or family after watching Thai public service advertising, indicating that well-designed public service advertising can resonate with the audience and spread to acquaintances. Sharing behaviour is an important symbol of audience emotional resonance and a link in the dissemination process. In addition, 47.2 per cent of people will post comments or reposts on social media, which suggests that in addition to the quality of production in advertisements, how to encourage audience interaction is also an important factor to consider. 36.7 per cent of people said that after watching Thai public service advertising, they would reconsider their lifestyle habits or attitudes. 35.3 per cent of the survey respondents stated that they will pay more attention to relevant general welfare organizations and activities, and 32.5 per cent of people will actively guide those around them. The above data once again proves the potential impact of Thai public service advertising.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

Firstly, the paper analyses the application of symbols in Thai public service advertising from a semiotic perspective and its dissemination to China effect. In the existing research field of Thai public service advertising, most of the

focus is on the creativity and narrative techniques of advertising. However, this study found that Thai public service advertising has successfully attracted the attention of Chinese audiences and resonated emotionally through visual and auditory symbols. It provides a new research perspective and approach for disseminating public service advertising. In addition, this study enriches the theoretical exploration of semiotics and provides literature support for subsequent discussions.

Secondly, this study provides a detailed analysis of the dissemination effects of Thai public service advertising in China at three levels: cognitive effects, attitude effects, and behavioural effects, providing a detailed framework for subsequent advertising research. Cross-national cultural dissemination is a hot topic, and how to effectively improve the dissemination effect of cross-border advertising is one of the academic research focuses. This study provides a specific method to provide theoretical support for achieving the dissemination effect of public service advertising in different cultural backgrounds.

5.2 Practical Contributions

Firstly, this study provides valuable references for advertising creators and advertising companies. Being adept at using symbols through meaningful textual symbols, vivid and positive character symbols, appropriate and distinctive scene symbols, and appropriate auditory symbols can enhance the audience's understanding of advertising. Moreover, when these symbols align with the audience's values, they can improve positive emotional responses and enhance the persuasiveness of the advertising. This helps advertisers consciously create content and improve the effectiveness of advertising dissemination.

Secondly, through qualitative and quantitative research, this study found that Thai public service advertising has a better dissemination effect in China than other Asian countries, influenced by the wide recognition Thai public service advertising receives and the study's findings that they can spread truth, goodness, and beauty, arouse the audience's sense of responsibility, and the audience will take positive actions after watching public service advertising. Moreover, through symbols, Thai public service advertising provides excellent inspiration for Chinese public service advertising in terms of advertising production and emotional resonance. It may also bring some inspiration to other countries in the creation and dissemination of public

service advertising. The study also found that audiences will spread their favourite advertisements to people around them or will interact on social platforms. Therefore, it is also necessary to consider enhancing audience interaction in disseminating advertising.

6. Shortcomings and Prospects of Research

Although we have gained valuable experience from the successful strategies of Thai public service advertising, this study still has certain limitations. Judging the effect of Thai public service advertising only by the case and data of the Bilibili platform, there is a certain degree of one-sidedness, and subsequent research will select platform data such as TikTok as a supplement. In addition, cultural differences and social development processes between China and Thailand may affect research on strategies. Further research is needed in cross-cultural advertising strategy research, data collection, and other areas for future research.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that Chinese producers of public service advertising pay more attention to the selection and use of symbols when creating and combining China's national conditions, society, and culture to produce higher quality and more widely disseminated public service advertising. Future research can also creatively integrate the successful experiences of other developed countries in public service advertising while respecting and preserving their own culture and characteristics to enrich the development path of Chinese public service advertising.

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Artificial Intelligence and Labour Productivity: Lessons from China

Norhanishah Mohamad *Yunus** and Lai Zouya^o

Abstract

This study investigates the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on labour productivity across China's manufacturing, services, and agriculture sectors by using the number of patented AI applications as a proxy for AI. The research spans the period from 2000 to 2019. Employing Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression analysis, our findings reveal that the influence of AI patent applications on labour productivity is more pronounced in the manufacturing sector compared to the services sector. In contrast, we observe insignificant results in the agriculture sector. Several factors contribute to these disparities, including the greater employment of highly skilled workers in China's manufacturing sector, while the services sector generates more jobs for less skilled employees due to lower AI utilisation. Nevertheless, we conclude that the effects of current AI patent applications on labour productivity in Chinese economic sectors are not immediate, only manifesting after several years. This lag can be attributed to the time required for patent processing and research and development (R&D) activities, along with the lag structure of labour productivity. Our results also underscore a notable gap in the rapid development of AI patent applications between agriculture and both the manufacturing and services sectors. This highlights the policy implications of the need to enhance coordination between industrial structures and employment structures across industries. Greater investments in patents, R&D, innovation activities, and workforce training should focus on industries with low AI adoption rates. Consequently, policymakers in China should prioritise augmenting the level of human capital by improving the technological skills of the labour force, enabling

* Senior Lecturer, School of Distance Education, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia.

^o Master Candidate at the School of Distance Education, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia;
Email: laizouya@student.usm.my

workers to assimilate AI, and increasing the number of AI patent applications across economic sectors.

Keywords: *AI patent applications, artificial intelligence, labour productivity.*

1. Introduction

Undoubtedly, technology-based artificial intelligence (AI) has played a major role in the digitization of the economy and society since its ability to collect, process, and analyse large amounts of data at a faster rate. Advances in AI have helped various industries create new technologies, improve business processes, and produce greater efficiency. AI is also considered a key driver of economic growth and is seen as a productivity-enhancing agent (Acemoglu et al., 2018). However, the slow economic growth experienced in developed countries also emphasises the extent to which AI can boost productivity. Data shows that 36 out of 37 developed economies experienced slower economic growth in 2006–2016 (1 per cent) compared to 1996–2006 (2.7 per cent), although AI applications have been widely used in developed countries (Furman and Seamans, 2019).

Slower economic growth in developed countries is still closely related to the decline in productivity, which is constrained by factors such as the difficulty workers face in learning new skills, the rate of AI adoption, and the extent to which AI interacts with the efficiency and knowledge of labour (Acemoglu and Restrepo, 2018). Likewise, the ability of labour and capital investment to drive economic progress has declined significantly globally (Purdy and Davarzani, 2015). The current level of technological progress that has not been fully utilised has led to structural changes that disrupt the composition of employment, and China is no exception to this situation. The increase in labour productivity in China could be affected if the emergence and development of AI are not fully utilised, which would lower both China's overall productivity and the trend of labour productivity. As evidenced in 2020, China's productivity is only about 7 per cent, which is low compared to 9.9 per cent in other developing countries (Yang et al., 2010). Meanwhile, China's labour productivity declined by 4.82 per cent year-over-year in December 2022, compared to growth of 9.05 per cent in the previous year.

A plausible reason for the declining trend of China's labour productivity may be attributed to the efforts of Chinese policymakers to make China a leader in the industrial revolution with a special focus on AI. The Chinese government has placed a specific emphasis on this goal in its national development policy by making significant capital investments in the high-tech industry based on AI technology (Sheehan, 2022). However, too much emphasis on AI development has raised concerns about potential drawbacks, such as the crowding out of R&D and productivity in sectors not strictly connected with AI, which tends to cause the development of other important economic sectors to be neglected (Arenal et al., 2020). As a result, the impact of AI on overall economic productivity becomes uncertain.

The emergence of AI has also created a discrepancy between China's employment structure and industrial structure, resulting in the country's low labour productivity (Zhang, 2020). The existing gap between the rapid development of AI and the practical application of AI has caused a mismatch between the transformations and the upgrading of China's industry and employment structure. This has further led to poor growth in the corresponding labour force across agriculture and service industries, resulting in low labour productivity. Therefore, it is debatable whether AI could improve labour productivity in China. Studies are required to quantify the effects of AI on economic outcomes like employment, productivity, growth, and labour productivity, but these studies are hampered by the requirement for accurate and excellent firm- and sectoral-level data (Furman and Seamans, 2019; Raj and Seamans, 2019).

This study provides a preliminary analysis based on the short-term series data regarding the impact of AI patent applications on China's labour productivity. In this study, we contribute to the innovation literature in two ways. First, we provide one of the earliest instances of how AI patent applications affect labour productivity at the sectoral level in China. Specifically, we investigate the impact of AI on labour productivity according to the technology intensity classification based on R&D intensity in China's economic sectors.¹ Most researchers and policymakers focused on high-technology industrial sectors such as ICT and manufacturing sectors, including in China, and often overlooked low-tech sectors like agriculture, despite the latter being one of the most important sectors contributing to China's economic development (Banerjee et al., 2018).

Thus, we attempt to contribute to the literature by focusing on the impact of AI patent applications in both high-tech and low-tech industrial sectors in China due to the limited number of studies that make comparisons, particularly involving the agriculture sector (Sheng et al., 2020). Realising that China's agricultural sector is currently experiencing pressure due to rapid population growth, degradation of agricultural land, and the pressure of conflict between the population and agricultural resources, it is important to explore the impact of AI in the agricultural sector. We measure this through labour productivity, considering it one of the main indicators of the ability of workers to adopt AI technology given mastery in the application of AI has been shown to improve the quality and accuracy of the overall harvest, in line with the goal of the agricultural sector to reduce inputs (Elbasi et al., 2022; Sheng et al., 2020).

Additionally, this paper uses the number of AI patents to represent the application of AI technology in investigating the impact of AI patents on labour productivity in China's economic sectors. China is emerging as a leader in AI as it shows improvement in filing of AI patents and experimenting with the most recent AI technologies to power industrial applications (Cheng and Zeng, 2023). The literature has shown increasing attention to the evolution of AI patent applications due to their positive effect on companies' performance, but their impact on labour productivity is still inadequate, and there is no clear consensus on how AI patents might influence both firms' productivity and labour productivity (Fujii and Managi, 2018; Cockburn et al., 2019; Máté et al., 2016; Yang, 2022).

To the best of our knowledge, only a study by Yang (2022) applied AI patents as a proxy to measure the effects of AI application in China's case, but the author's focus was on firms' productivity and employment and not specifically divided according to China's economic sector levels. The study provides suggestions and brief ideas for policy implications regarding the effectiveness of patent applications in the industry. These ideas may be applicable in the context of the Chinese labour market, as the restructuring of labour supply and demand would help China respond to the industry's demand for and the speed of AI development across the world. Therefore, our comparative examination between high-tech and low-tech sectors would show the level of employee productivity to be gained from the application of patented AI. The results of this study will also help China's economic sectors better understand its employees' capability to capture AI technology,

which will have structural and scale implications for restructuring the labour market. This scale effect will aid businesses in deciding whether to raise labour demand, which will result in more jobs and higher salaries. At the same time, the structural impact would create a redistribution of tasks between humans and machines, which might result in a loss of tasks for humans (displacement effect) or an increase in new or changed job responsibilities (Damoli et al., 2021; Fossen et al., 2022).

Meanwhile, our findings may enhance managers' use of AI in connection with industry-related AI patent applications to boost market capitalization and enable businesses to have improved labour productivity (Máté et al., 2016; Yang, 2022). Since the lack of labour skills and AI talent has a direct impact on the application of AI in businesses, managers must be aware of these implications and work with their teams to develop more collaborative production models that actively involve both humans and machines. This is due to the fact that recently developed AI and robotics would eliminate jobs and cause irreparable harm to the labour market.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows: Section 2 reviews the literature related to AI from theoretical and empirical perspectives. The methodology section, which includes the data sources, scope of the study, and variables used in this study, is explained in Section 3. Section 4 explains the empirical model. The findings of this study are discussed in Section 5. The conclusion and suggestions for policy implications are presented in Section 6.

2. Literature Review

The concept and application of AI in academics is not standardised, and its technical application is still being broadened. McCorduck and Cfe (2004) characterised AI as a “thinking machine” that can currently mimic human thought and behaviour and, in the future, may outperform it. The concept of organisational competence was used by Bharadwaj et al. (1998) to define AI technology. The productivity of the workforce can be increased by integrating AI technology with various organisational resources and tasks. According to Singh et al. (2020), AI is a technology that encourages industry to spend more capital. They stressed that despite the fact that utilising AI would boost labour productivity because it reduces labour time, it would also result in a decrease in the usage of labour that would eventually be replaced by technology. Additionally, they claimed that the value composition of

capital is impacted by its technological composition, which raises the relative surplus value of capital. However, Muhanna and Stoel (2010) discovered that investing funds in AI technologies is unlikely to result in higher labour productivity. They contend that specific market and business-specific criteria determine the actual impact of such a fast investment. Brynjolfsson and Mitchell (2017) expanded on this by further classifying AI-related issues into four categories: misleading expectations, incorrect measurement, reorganisation effect, and general technology adoption.

Romer's (1990) model serves as the foundation for the theory of technological progress, which claims that the application of AI leads to productivity changes among industries. Thus, factors of production such as labour will be optimally allocated and directly or indirectly affect the share of employment and output value of each industry, i.e., industrial structural change. Romer's model also refers to the combined input productivity of all factors as total factor productivity (TFP), and an increase in TFP indicates that it is possible to produce the same amount of goods with the same resources or with fewer resources. Based on Romer's analysis, AI may cause changes in the allocation of factors of production between industries, thus affecting labour productivity. Meanwhile, the endogenous growth theory contends that increases in productivity can be directly linked to more rapid innovation and greater investments in human capital from both the government and private sectors.

Given that AI may be regarded as a technology that has only recently gained attention and been applied in an extensive number of studies, the literature has shown that there is not enough evidence to accurately assess and gauge the development of AI by using appropriate proxies (e.g., Chen et al., 2020; Damioli et al., 2021; Purdy and Davarzani, 2015). However, most of the research indicates that the most prevalent approach to measuring the advancement of AI is the number of industrial robots utilised in the industry. For example, empirical studies include those by Graetz and Michaels (2015), Acemoglu and Restrepo (2018) in the United States, and Zhu and Li (2018) in China. These studies employed total sales of industrial robots to demonstrate the extent of AI application in the various economic sectors. They came to the conclusion that as AI advances and technical expertise rises, there will be an increase in the proportion of skilled and unskilled workers in the labour force. This will enhance the overall quality of the labour force and optimise the labour structure. Qiulin et al. (2019) focused

on the degree of robot installation, which they determined by dividing the total number of intelligent robots installed in the domestic sector by the number of workers employed in that year as a measure of the industry's adoption of AI. According to a survey by the European Commission of the 3,000 manufacturing companies, the usage of industrial robots has contributed to achieving higher labour productivity (Jäger et al., 2015).

Since patents are a significant driver of productivity development and firm performance, AI patent data is another body of literature that has been used extensively to measure AI. For instance, Van Roy et al. (2020) examined the economic outcomes of European companies that filed patents for AI (i.e., "AI creators") from 2000 to 2016. Using a keyword-based approach to find AI patents, they discovered a large increase in annual sales for AI developers with at least one granted patent, particularly SMEs, as compared to companies with only ungranted AI patent applications. A panel data set of German companies was used by Behrens and Trunschke (2020) to examine the impact of patents on the industry 4.0 revolution. According to this study, the marginal benefit of additional "4.0 patents" will boost company revenues by 8.3 per cent, with the marginal effect decreasing with business size.

The literature showed that there are only a small number of studies that expressly explore the impact of AI on labour productivity using patent information, namely Yang (2022), Cockburn et al. (2019), and Alderucci and Sicker (2019). However, their research still focused on studying the effects of AI on firm productivity, labour demand and employment. However, studies that specifically examine how AI patents affect worker labour productivity are still absent and require further study given the widespread concern and debate surrounding its potential repercussions in job losses and wage stagnation for most workers (Brynjolfsson and McAfee, 2015).

We discovered that only a few studies have examined the impact of AI on labour productivity using different AI proxies. For example, Damioli et al. (2021) investigated the impact of patent applications for AI on labour productivity using AI patents and robotics as their AI proxies. Using a global sample of 5,257 firms, they found that most companies were filing a minimum of one AI-related patent between 2000 and 2016. Their analysis showed that AI patent applications and robotics activities had a significant impact on firm labour productivity. They also found that the impact of AI and robotics applications in industry is highly dependent on the capacity of the SME sector and the service sector to quickly adopt AI-based technology

to increase the effectiveness of the manufacturing process in the SME sector and productivity in the service sector.

Acemoglu and Restrepo (2018) examined how the adoption of industrial robots affects US labour productivity. They investigated in detail the impact of the large-scale use of robots on labour productivity in 19 manufacturing industries across 722 regions between 1993 and 2007. Overall, their findings show that the widespread use of robots in the manufacturing sector has a very negative impact on worker productivity because the impact of robots outweighs the creation advantage. The results of their study revealed that the use of industrial robots contributed to an increase in the number of unemployed workers in the manufacturing sector from 360,000 to 670,000 between 1990 and 2007. However, their findings raise concerns about the future of jobs, and wages are increasing as robots and technology provide other computer-aided replacements for labour-intensive tasks. According to their estimates, each additional robot increases the job-to-population ratio from 0.18 to 0.34 age points and increases the wage by 0.25 to 0.5 per cent per 1,000 workers. They also suggest that the use of robots in one shuttle zone could reduce production costs and, through trade, allow other industries to create jobs across the economy. The application of AI in the agricultural sector has recently been the centre of attention. Bannerjee et al. (2018) investigated the impact of AI on the agricultural sector. Their findings show that although the application of AI does not show a significant increase in the number of farmers interested in using AI in agricultural activities, but the application of AI technology has improved farmers' relationships with the market by changing their work habits and practices. Lele et al. (2017) also focused on the agricultural sector, showing that smart digital technology is beneficial to inclusive agricultural and rural development, is capable of bridging farmers and markets at every stage of production, and has indirectly increased farmers' incomes. Several schemes have been put in place to raise the standard of education, healthcare, finances, and market services for farmers in an effort to boost their income.

Other studies by Brogårdh (2007) and Bechar and Vigneault (2016) show that AI applications mean robots are now fully-equipped to maximise output in the agricultural sector, increase productivity and the standard of agricultural products. Spanaki et al. (2021) show that the use of data can improve farming practices and operations because agri-food businesses can create value from it, depending on the ability of AI to manage data

sharing and access control. Therefore, AI can address the knowledge needs of farming businesses and improve their ability to identify diseases, monitor irrigation, reduce human effort, and maximise yield production. According to Spanaki et al. (2021), the use of data can improve agricultural processes and practices because agri-food enterprises can profit from it; however, it depends on the capacity of AI to oversee information sharing and accessibility. As a result, AI can help farming enterprises improve their ability to detect disease, track irrigation, save labour costs, and increase agricultural production.

Regarding research that examines the impact of AI applications in the service sector, Trajtenberg (2018) shows that the impact of AI has increased the number of jobs in the socially intensive sector in the United States by 24 per cent, and wages increased by 26 per cent between 1980 and 2012. By 2024, the author predicts that as industry begins to use AI for its tasks and production, almost all new jobs will be concentrated in the sector, particularly in healthcare and social assistance services. Using the number of patents and trademarks as a proxy for AI, Máté et al. (2016) examined the effects of AI on labour productivity in the long run in several OECD countries. Additionally, they used dynamic panel regression models to look at the long-term effects of intellectual property rights on productivity to see if there is a connection between output per person and the number of patents and trademarks. Based on their findings, the increasing number of patents and trademarks may be inversely correlated with labour productivity growth in the context of knowledge-intensive (business) service industries between 1995 and 2011. Their research's conclusions accord with the conclusions made by Park (2005), who showed a negative effect of trademarks and no direct effect of intellectual property rights (IPR) on labour productivity in the manufacturing sector. The negative impact of trade and IPR on labour productivity was also confirmed by Chen and Puttitanun (2005), who stated that there is a U-shaped relationship between IPR and economic development due to the stronger incentives of developing countries to imitate the higher IPR protection of developed countries, while the high level of IPR can stimulate productivity growth. Inversely, to a certain extent, productivity decreases, which is consistent with the rise in IPR experienced by most OECD countries. Based on the literature presented above, the understanding of how the application of AI patents can improve labour productivity, especially in the economic sectors, is not comprehensive and

is still in its early phase, which may be due to a lack of data. This situation shows that additional quantitative research and numerical analysis are still needed to fully understand how advancing the level of AI development and practical application by workers affects labour productivity (Damioli et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2020). As such, the study found that quantitative methods allow us to gauge the degree of workers' absorption capability based on the value of the labour productivity coefficient (Yunus, 2023; Wu and Yang, 2022; Zhang, 2020).

3. Methods

3.1 Data Sources and the Scope of Study

The data sources used to calculate labour productivity, which require the variables of value added and the number of employees in China's manufacturing, services, and agriculture sectors, were gathered from the China Macroeconomic Database. We obtained data from the National Industrial Information Security Development Research Centre and the Electronic Intellectual Property Centre of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology for AI data, which is measured by the number of patented AI applications. These sources provide information about China's economic sectors and offer reports on China's patents related to AI technology. Additionally, we utilised the China Statistical Yearbook to obtain other variables, namely, fixed capital stock, the per centage number of employees involved in science and technology activities as part of the total workforce, fiscal education expenditure, research and experimental development expenditure, gross domestic product (GDP), and total import and export volume.

The sample size in this study is limited to 20 observations because our study covers the period 2000–2019, taking complete data into account. In the period 2000–2019, the number of AI patent applications has been large in accordance with the initiatives of the Chinese government to further expand R&D funds for AI, and the number of research projects in AI sponsored by the Chinese government has increased significantly since 2000 (Sheehan, 2022). During the period of investigation, China also consistently filed more AI patents than any other country. For instance, as of March 2019, there were 1,189 Chinese AI companies. Nonetheless, the coverage is constrained because finalised data for China's patented AI applications, including in the Chinese economic sectors, has not been released after 2019 (Barton et al., 2017).

3.2 Variables

The dependent variable in this study is labour productivity (LP), which is measured as value added per worker in specific sectors (Acemoglu et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2001; Yang, 2022). We applied a similar approach in our study to calculate labour productivity for China's manufacturing, services, and agriculture sectors. For the independent variable, we focus on the number of patented AI applications (*AI_PATENT*) because of its significant impact on labour productivity, as indicated in current literature on China's sectoral labour productivity (Damioli et al., 2021; Yang, 2022). Patent information serves as a practical source of data since firms have a strong motivation to patent their AI-related technology to prevent replication, hinder future competitors, and maximise commercial revenues (Yang, 2022). AI patents provide the best proxy for AI technology because the information contained in the process of AI patents embodies the components of invention, utility, and new design, which are associated with new technical solutions for products and processes. Patents are considered to have greater technological novelty and positively impact labour productivity. AI patent applications help capture changes in a firm's AI knowledge base (Damioli et al., 2021).

3.3 Control Variables

This study incorporates control variables known in the literature to impact labour productivity, namely, human capital, research and experimental development expenditure, and foreign trade level. For the human capital variable, two proxies were used, namely, education fiscal expenditure (*EXP_EDU*) and the number of employees involved in science and technology activities (*EMP_ST*) (Le et al., 2019; Towse, 2006). Education fiscal expenditure is measured as the per centage of education fiscal expenditure relative to total fiscal expenditure in China (Luo et al., 2019; Maazouz, 2013; Wulandari et al., 2021). Both variables, which represent the human capital proxy, are well utilised in empirical studies to investigate their impact on labour productivity (e.g., Le et al., 2019; Towse, 2006; Yunus et al., 2014; Yunus, 2020). Both proxies are also compatible with the theory of endogenous economic growth, which redefines labour as an investment in human capital, emphasising both workforce size and quality (knowledge and skills) as important indicators to determine higher labour productivity growth.

Additionally, in the context of China, it is important to look at the impact of education expenditure on productivity so that adjustments to education and training policies can be implemented. This is particularly relevant considering the shortage of AI talent in China and the need to enhance technological capabilities in the production industry. The main obstacle to the spread of AI technology in China is the lack of AI talent (Liu et al., 2021).

In our study, research and experimental development expenditure (RDE) was also chosen as one of the control variables due to its crucial role in a country's technological progress and economic development, which ultimately influence labour productivity (Parham and Zheng, 2006). In addition, RDE expenditure is measured as a percentage of GDP. In the context of China, the effects of research and experimental development expenditure on economic outcomes need to be investigated as the Chinese government increases support for R&D projects in AI-related fields. The government has also established academic groups such as the Professional Committee on Pattern Recognition and Machine Intelligence of the Chinese Society of Automation and the Chinese Society of Artificial Intelligence (Roberts et al., 2021). Adopting this proxy for labour productivity estimation, the study aims to assess the effectiveness of investment in scientific research in relation to workers' labour productivity, thereby enabling firms to enhance their technical capability and profitability. Meanwhile, foreign trade level (*TRADE*) is used as the index of an export-oriented economy, measuring it as the total import and export volume (Acemoglu and Restrepo, 2018; Luo et al., 2019). Foreign trade level reflects the degree of China's openness to the outside world, which can significantly impact China's total labour productivity.

4. Empirical Model

Given that studies on AI and labour productivity in China are still in their early stages, this study also paves the way for future studies on how AI, through the patented AI applications in China, could potentially enhance labour productivity in the economic sectors (Alderucci and Sicker, 2019; Damioli et al., 2021). The combined role of AI, human capital, RDE, and foreign trade level in the labour productivity policy in China has received relatively little attention (Yang, 2022). Romer (1990) stressed that these complementary inputs could determine whether physical capital (investment

in R&D expenditure and/or a combination of both internal and external knowledge, such as investment in education, job training, and technological progress via trade and FDI) should be applied in the growth and productivity model. Hence, this study attempts to contribute to the literature by re-estimating the labour productivity function for China's manufacturing, services and agriculture sectors based on the combination of the independent variables.

The theoretical framework in our study follows the research by Damioli et al. (2021) and Banerjee et al. (2018), which investigated the effects of AI on labour productivity. They measure AI using robotics and patented AI applications as proxies. In our study, due to limited sectoral data availability, we excluded the robotics variable and considered AI patent applications as the best proxy, consistent with the empirical model specification used by Fujii and Managi (2018) and Cockburn et al. (2019). The combined other independent variables, namely, human capital, research and experimental development expenditure, and foreign trade level, which were suggested by Acemoglu and Restrepo (2018), Gollin et al. (2014), Yunus et al. (2015), and Le et al. (2019) were applied in our model estimation. The basic model in this study, based on the Cobb-Douglas model for investigating the effects of AI combined with independent variables on labour productivity in China's economic sectors, is presented as follows:

$$LP_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 K/L_{i,t} + \beta_2 AI_PATENT_{i,t} + \beta_3 EXP_EDU_{i,t} + \beta_4 EMP_ST_{i,t} + \beta_5 RDE_{i,t} + \beta_6 TRADE_{i,t} + \varepsilon_{i,t} \quad (1)$$

where: i refers to China's economic sectors respectively for manufacturing, services and agriculture sectors; t is the time index; LP is labour productivity according to China's economic sectors as the dependent variable; K/L is physical capital labour ratio;² AI_PATENT is the number of patented AI applications; EXP_EDU is the per centage of education fiscal expenditure from total fiscal expenditure; EMP_ST is measured as the per centage of employees involved in science and technology activities from the total number of employees; RDE is the per centage of research and experimental development expenditure per GDP; $TRADE$ is the total import and export volume; ε_i is the error term.

When studying the impact of AI on labour productivity, endogenous issues are considered. To better solve this problem, we followed Damioli et

al. (2021) to lag the period of the dependent variable with one lag period. The estimation model for labour productivity in China with the lag of labour productivity according to economic sectors is presented below:

$$LP_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 LP'_{i,t-1} + \beta_2 K/L_{i,t} + \beta_3 AI_PATENT_{i,t} + \beta_4 EXP_EDU_{i,t} + \beta_5 EMP_ST_{i,t} + \beta_6 RDE_{i,t} + \beta_7 TRADE_{i,t} + \varepsilon_{i,t} \quad (2)$$

where: $LAP'_{i,t-1}$ is the lagged China's labour productivity according to economic sectors. This specification allows for gradual convergence in efficiency levels between sectors, which has been observed as important in past empirical productivity studies to improve their productivity faster (Blundell and Bond, 2000; Damioli et al., 2021; Klette and Johansen, 2000; Lokshin et al., 2008).

With the limitation of time series data (20 observations), the present study employed an OLS estimator with robust standard errors to analyse the impact of AI patent applications on labour productivity during the period from 2000 to 2019.³ The robust standard errors option in regression was also efficient in dealing with the minor normality problem because some observations might exhibit large residuals, leverage, or influence, as well as to capture the possible concerns about the effects of serial correlation on the standard errors (Hoechle, 2007). Even though this study only employed OLS estimation for a small sample, the results could still provide a preliminary picture of China's patented AI applications and labour productivity in China's economic sectors.

5. Findings

This section discusses the OLS regression results by narrowing the impact of patented AI applications on China's manufacturing, services and agriculture sectors.

5.1 Correlation Results

In this study, correlation analyses were performed as a preliminary step to assess the validity of the variables before analysing the OLS estimation results. Specifically, we conducted validity tests on the variables used as the main determinants of labour productivity. We employed correlation analysis due to the lack of studies that performed validity tests in the context of

labour productivity (Yunus and Abdullah, 2022b). Consequently, the validity results of the proxies were assessed based on their correlation values. If the correlation coefficient between the independent variables indicates a positive value, it is interpreted as an indicator of a strong relationship with the dependent variable (Yunus, 2023). As shown in Table 5.1, the positive coefficient obtained from these correlation analyses provides compelling evidence that nearly all the variables used in this study can be considered influential factors affecting labour productivity within China's economic sectors. Furthermore, the positive correlation observed between labour productivity and the independent variables also suggests a clear trend within most sectors in China that have benefited from exploiting the opportunities of a new degree of automation brought by AI technologies in their industries.

Table 5.1 Correlation Results for China's Manufacturing, Agriculture, and Services Sectors

Manufacturing								
	LP	LP'-1	K/L	AI_PATENT	EMP_ST	EXP_EDU	RDE	TRADE
LP	1.000							
LP'-1	0.212	1.000						
K/L	0.453	0.417	1.000					
AI_PATENT	0.621	-0.410	0.512	1.000				
EMP_ST	0.678	-0.601	0.423	0.632	1.000			
EXP_EDU	0.572	0.162	0.224	0.357	0.424	1.000		
RDE	0.681	0.521	0.235	0.665	0.731	-0.335	1.000	
TRADE	0.325	-0.322	-0.254	0.719	0.350	0.408	0.717	1.000
Services								
	LP	LP'-1	K/L	AI_PATENT	EMP_ST	EXP_EDU	RDE	TRADE
LP	1.000							
LP'-1	0.324	1.000						
K/L	0.412	0.362	1.000					
AI_PATENT	0.425	0.403	-0.213	1.000				
EMP_ST	0.215	0.612	0.456	0.661	1.000			
EXP_EDU	0.472	0.296	0.314	0.479	0.524	1.000		
RDE	-0.616	0.524	0.436	0.637	0.624	-0.318	1.000	
TRADE	-0.532	0.415	-0.242	-0.671	-0.391	0.346	-0.739	1.000

Agriculture								
	LP	LP ⁻¹	K/L	AI_PATENT	EMP_ ST	EXP_ EDU	RDE	TRADE
LP	1.000							
LP ⁻¹	0.342	1.000						
K/L	0.388	0.317	1.000					
AI_PATENT	0.727	0.392	0.453	1.000				
EMP_ST	0.648	0.518	0.251	0.759	1.000			
EXP_EDU	0.591	0.392	0.312	0.318	-0.542	1.000		
RDE	-0.642	0.5912	0.502	0.665	0.721	-0.449	1.000	
TRADE	-0.501	-0.357	-0.245	0.719	0.416	0.412	0.724	1.000

Note: All variables are transformed into natural log

To ensure firms are equipped to assimilate the latest technology, investment in education, R&D, and scientific research activities should be increased. This would ultimately enhance the overall productivity of the sector.

We also found a negative correlation between the coefficient of RDE and trade and labour productivity in both the agriculture and services sectors. This finding suggests that the impact of investment in scientific research on labour productivity is associated with the sector’s characteristics, such as the technology and type of sector (Damioli et al., 2021; Yang, 2022; Zouya and Yunus, 2024). The results of the correlation analysis in this study provide a more accurate picture than the individual data points. Notably, all variables’ correlation coefficients were less than 0.8, demonstrating the absence of multicollinearity in the study’s model (Gujarati and Porter, 2012).

5.2 Regression Results

Table 5.2 presents the results for the three models investigating the impacts of AI along with other influencers of labour productivity in China’s manufacturing, agriculture, and services sectors. We utilised lagged variables of labour productivity to address time series persistence and endogeneity problems. Our findings reveal a positive and statistically significant effect of lagged labour productivity influencing labour productivity in China’s economic sectors throughout the model.

Next, we shift our focus to the variable of interest in our study to seek the impact of AI patent applications on labour productivity. Our results in models (1) and (2) show that the application of patented AI in firm processes,

product development, and monitoring has a significant positive impact on labour productivity for both China's manufacturing and services sectors. These results imply that by increasing innovation efforts by filing more patents for AI, labour productivity will increase by 31.8 per cent and 18.2 per cent, respectively, in the manufacturing and service sectors. These results are supported by Alderucci and Sicker (2019) and Damioli et al. (2021), all of whom report that the use of patented AI is positively associated with sales growth, labour market outcomes, and enhanced labour productivity within companies.

The higher coefficient of AI patent activity in the manufacturing sector compared to the service sector found in this study implies that the manufacturing sector in China may have more intensive patent applications and stronger patent laws than other sectors (Hu et al., 2012). The hiring of a higher number of highly skilled and talented workers in the manufacturing than in the services sectors may have different effects on labour productivity, in line with the skill-biased technological change (SBTC) theory. This statement can be supported by our results from model (2), which indicated that the percentage of employees involved in science and technology activities in manufacturing sectors is positive and significant, influencing labour productivity by more than 20 per cent.

A previous study by Xue et al. (2022) provides a comparison of AI applications between the manufacturing and services sectors in China, which may support the different results found in our study. Their results showed that in China's services sector, there is still more employment that needs to be maintained and more jobs created for less skilled employees due to a lower automation level, which still requires some level of human intervention or interaction. The deskilling effect of the automation technology used makes the occupations simpler and enables fewer qualified individuals to complete them in the services sector. Although the tasks in some manufacturing sectors are repetitive, standardised, and mostly free of human touch, a significant degree of customisation and the involvement of highly skilled workers are necessary in the manufacturing process, which contributes to the higher productivity of the manufacturing sector. As a result of the different characteristics between China's economic sectors, it leads to greater adoption of AI applications in the manufacturing sector compared to the service sector.

Table 5.2 Ordinary Least Square Estimation on Labour Productivity for China's Manufacturing, Agriculture, and Services Sectors

Dependent Variable: Labour productivity	Model (1) Manufacturing	Model (2) Services	Model (3) Agriculture
LP ⁻¹	0.024(0.059) ***	0.057(0.087) **	0.064(0.071) *
Physical capital stock/ labour ratio (K/L)	0.032(0.163) *	0.254(0.205) **	-0.256(0.192) *
The number of patented AI applications (<i>AI_PATENT</i>)	0.318(0.151) ***	0.182(0.136)*	-0.256(0.195)
the per centage of education fiscal expenditure (<i>EXP_EDU</i>)	0.195(0.028) ***	0.143(0.043) *	0.268(0.050) **
the per centage number of employees involved in science and technology activities (<i>EMP_ST</i>)	0.213(0.072) ***	-0.278(0.079) ***	0.215(0.081)
Research and experimental development expenditure (<i>RDE</i>)	0.255(0.158) *	-0.237(0.173) *	-0.108(0.130)
Foreign Trade Level (<i>TRADE</i>) total import and export volume	0.181(0.056) ***	0.212(0.094) *	0.165(0.240)
Observation	20	20	20
R-squared	0.886	0.827	0.871

Notes. The dependent variable is labour productivity for manufacturing sector (Model 1), services sector (Model 2) and agriculture sector in China (Model 3). All variables are transformed into natural log. Huber/white robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$ and * $p < 0.1$ indicate significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectively.

The impact of applying patented AI in the agriculture sector, however, was negative and did not significantly influence the agriculture sector's labour productivity. In the case of China's agriculture sector, our results suggest that firms require some time to adapt to the new technologies in their production and sectors' routines, which may be due to the lack of expertise and talent among the farmers to utilize the application of patent-based AI by agriculture sectors, since the integration of AI requires extensive cognitive computing, deep learning, and image recognition. This statement can be supported by our results in column (2), which showed that the number of workers involved in scientific research in the agriculture sector is not significant and is seen as one of the constraints to increasing agriculture's

labour productivity. This result suggests that an insufficient number of farmers are directly accessing digital agriculture due to a lack of qualified farmland.

A previous study by Xie et al. (2021) demonstrated that rural Chinese labour is frequently undereducated and that present output is heavily reliant on experience. Urbanisation has led to the continuous inflow of young and strong labour into cities, resulting in an increasing proportion of older farmers in rural areas. Most farmers have not realised the value of digital agriculture, and they are not willing to invest in or unable to apply technology-based AI. These concerns, however, are not addressed in our current research due to the limitation of time series data on the issues. Therefore, the employees' involvement in scientific research aimed at increasing their absorptive capacity to exploit and assimilate patent applications in agriculture should be encouraged, as farmers need a certain skill set as AI is a complex system. The Chinese government should also increase their investment in AI and R&D in order to fully promote the digital transformation of agricultural production and operation, including planting information and the quality and safety control of food. China's investment in digital agriculture is lower than developed countries. Despite this, it has created a firm foundation in digital technology and economic development (Xie et al., 2021). The decision to increase the hiring and training of highly specialised AI talent can enable the agriculture sector to enter the productivity boom phase.

Another study showed that the differences in results between economic sectors may be due to the AI technology in the first period still being less mature, characterized by less frequent patenting, and that sectors probably had less experience fully exploiting it as digital agriculture is a technology-based industry. Similarly, the different results of the effect of patented AI on labour productivity between economic sectors might imply that the productivity of one sector also depends on the patent investment from other industries, as the knowledge may not have been originally contributed by their own investments in artificial intelligence and R&D. Instead, it may be affected by the knowledge of other firms or sectors through borrowing or even stealing (Damioli et al., 2021).

Lastly, we provide the results on the effects of control variables that affect labour productivity in China's economic sectors. At first glance, the effects of both human capital variables positively affect labour productivity

across sectors. For instance, our results in model (1) showed that a one per cent increase in education fiscal expenditure and the number of employees involved actively in science and technology activities would increase the manufacturing sector's labour productivity by 19.5 per cent and 21.3 per cent, respectively. This result is supported by other empirical studies that found that involvement of educated and skilled workers in R&D activity and investment in education have a significant impact on labour productivity (e.g., Yunus et al., 2014; Afrooz et al., 2010; Goedhuys et al., 2006). Our findings may be in line with the efforts of the Chinese government, which continues to boost investment in new technologies in response to the need to provide young people with knowledge and skills and to promote employees' participation in scientific research, which is complementary to the use of AI-based technology in industry. These initiatives also seek to ensure that workers can adopt new digital technologies, increasing labour efficiency in their workplaces and enabling them to prosper in a labour market that is rapidly evolving (McGivney and Winthrop, 2016).

Regarding the effect of research and experimental development expenditure on labour productivity in China's economic sectors, our results found a significant and positive correlation for the manufacturing sector but a negative correlation with labour productivity in the service sector. This finding could be due to the crowding-out effect (Yunus et al., 2015; Yunus and Abdullah, 2022b). The effect of crowding tends to occur because investment in R&D is concentrated in some selected industries. Industries receiving higher investment in scientific research, such as China's manufacturing sector, will enjoy better technology and lower production costs, thereby increasing their labour productivity.

The effects of trade via import-export activity on labour productivity in the agriculture sector differ from the results found in China's manufacturing and services sectors. The distinction between sectoral and factorial dimensions in industries leads to different kinds of skills, as outlined in the Heckscher-Ohlin theory and the Stolper-Samuelson theorem (HOS) (Wood, 1994). As a result, in the case of China, the agriculture sector is hindered from replicating the imported intermediate inputs, particularly technological knowledge, due to the excessive number of untrained workers at numerous production phases and the limited capacity absorption of local enterprises. This could eventually result in specialisation in the intensive use of unskilled workers due to a crowding-out effect.

6. Conclusion and Policy Implications

This study adopted the number of patented AI applications as a main proxy for AI, along with a set of other explanatory variables have rarely been used in literature, to analyse its impacts on labour productivity in China's manufacturing, agriculture, and services sectors. The advantage of using AI patents as a proxy is the ability to measure changes in the knowledge of firms in the field of AI and their ability to track and analyse the adoption and spread of AI technologies in the economy over a period of time and space. The OLS estimation results from 2000 to 2019 confirm that the use of AI patents has a significant positive impact on the manufacturing and service sectors' labour productivity. This is consistent with the growth of AI adoption, which has been aided by supportive legislation, ample funding, and likely high government encouragement from China for the high-tech sector to utilise AI patents. Our results indicate that China's manufacturing sector is characterised by a high number of skilled workers as compared to the services sector, contributing to the higher level of absorption of patented AI applications in their production activities and firm routines, hence leading to the sector's higher labour productivity.

In the agriculture sector, however, we observed that the effects of applying AI patents are not statistically significant in increasing the agriculture sector's labour productivity. The contrasting findings between high- and low-tech sectors suggest that firms may face possible lags in determining future R&D and patent productivity. The lag could be attributed to firms needing time to decide whether to use or produce a successfully completed patent application in AI, as well as an R&D project. This study also shows that a significant technological improvement in AI could vary depending on the time period required for the AI revolution to allow AI applications to become complementary and grow within an industry.

As the study's findings favour AI, to mitigate the dual negative effects of the country's falling working-age population the Chinese government needs to take further measures to boost labour productivity by promoting AI development. At present, AI in the new era is mainly applied to manufacturing and service sectors, resulting in a bottleneck in the development of China's agriculture sector. As a result, the agriculture sector's growth in labour productivity is slow or even declining. The government's focus, therefore, should be the integration of AI in the agricultural sector, especially in the conversion of small farms to digital

agriculture, despite the fact that digital agriculture technology is better suited for larger farms.

The Chinese government is recommended to enhance the wide range of data accessible for AI development in order to make AI a viable development engine for China over time. This may be achievable by creating several industry-specific datasets, introducing new policies, and opening access to the public for data related to AI development, the economy, public services, recreation, and health, as practiced in New York. This action needs to be taken in China, since more than 40 per cent of businesses in China's conventional industries do not yet consider AI to be a strategic imperative. As a result, many of them have yet to capture the information required to support upcoming AI installations. This situation is noticeable in agricultural industry firms, where top management rarely keeps detailed records on topics like planting schedules or how weather affects output. However, this is the kind of data that AI systems can use to uncover insightful patterns and improve efficiency. Comparatively, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Japan have put in place national information systems to gather such data and use cutting-edge analysis for contemporary agricultural management.

To promote the adoption of AI patents in the industry, our study suggests that policymakers should focus on helping the economics sector overcome problems such as the lack of awareness about the use of AI, financial problems, and a lack of technical skills in AI. Some of these problems can be solved using conventional economic instruments like tax breaks and subsidies. The government may additionally consider leading the way in implementing AI systems in all bureaucracies. By building up technical expertise and talent, this endeavour will eventually lower the cost of AI adoption by stimulating the market and supporting government suppliers.

In the meantime, industry stakeholders should give priority to established policies in order to take advantage of the knowledge spillovers from AI technology and boost the adoption of new frameworks that are better suited for gauging AI's impact on labour productivity. This endeavour aims to ensure that managers are better knowledgeable about the real-world effects of AI to enable them to reorganise work in a way that complements labour and AI robots.

Lastly, although the results of our study on a small sample suggest that patent applications can influence higher labour productivity in the manufacturing industry compared to other sectors in China, we observe that

a longer period is needed to analyse whether the growth and adoption of AI technology would lead to productivity increases for both big and small manufacturing companies. This would require future studies to address. As our study is limited in terms of the time period investigated, the differences in the methodological approach employed, heterogeneity in data, and the absence of a clear and agreed definition of AI, it may have produced different study results from previous research. Thus, future studies could expand their context across countries and time. Future research models could also include other proxies that measure the application of AI patents, such as invention variables protected by other formal (e.g., software copyright) and informal intellectual property rights (e.g., confidentiality), to encompass the whole range of cutting-edge AI advancements.

Notes

- ¹ Based on the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC), manufacturing and services sectors are classified as high-tech industrial sectors and agriculture as a low-tech sector.
- ² We adopt the perpetual inventory method (PIM) to measure physical capital as suggested by Griliches (1980).
- ³ It is crucial to emphasise that before choosing OLS as the preferred method for analysing the study's data, a few model selection tests, including the Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) and Vector Error Correction Model (VECM) models, were conducted. Regrettably, these alternative approaches failed to yield optimal results. The number of observations (N) must be more than 30 in order to conduct both estimations (Maitra, 2019).

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Chinese Self-Presentations of Happiness on Social Media: A Content Analysis of New Year Wishes

Meilian Zhuang*, Ratanachote Thienmongkol^o, Ruethai Nimnoi[•] and Shaoye Luo**

*Department of New Media, Faculty of Informatics,
Mahasarakham University

^oDepartment of New Media, Faculty of Informatics,
Mahasarakham University

[•]Department of Information Science, Faculty of Informatics,
Mahasarakham University

**New Engineering Industry College, Putian University, China

Abstract

The understanding of happiness is subjective, with cultural tendency. Nowadays, New Year's wishes have become a culture in China. The wishes of individuals, to a certain extent, reflect their inner needs and desires, and can be considered as a window and channel from which to interpret individual views of happiness. In this study, social media users' posts are considered as self-reports, enabling an exploration of Chinese users' perspectives on happiness through content analysis of their New Year's wishes. A total sample size of 1,581 posts from three consecutive

* Meilian Zhuang, PhD Candidate at the Department of New Media, Faculty of Informatics, Mahasarakham University, Thailand. Her research areas include new media communication and culture communication. She can be reached at <zml20011002@163.com>.

^o Ratanachote Thienmongkol (corresponding author) is currently an Associate Professor at the Department of New Media, Faculty of Informatics, Mahasarakham University, Thailand. His academic research focuses on improving the empowerment of visualization for user recognition and reading acquisition based on the Human Centered Design (HCD) concept. He can be contacted via email at <ratanachote.t@msu.ac.th>.

[•] Ruethai Nimnoi is currently an Assistant Professor at the Department of Information Science, Faculty of Informatics, Mahasarakham University, Thailand. She is committed to the study of information science. She can be reached at <ruethai.n@msu.ac.th>.

** Shaoye Luo is an Associate Professor at the New Engineering Industry College, Putian University, Fujian Province, China. His research focuses on data mining and analysis. He can be reached at <lsy123@163.com>.

years (2021-2023) was collected using a Python program from Sina Weibo. These posts were then coded based on a coding scheme developed through prior empirical categorization processes. The findings reveal a comprehensive portrayal of happiness as perceived by Chinese people from ten dimensions: being in a positive mental state, having future expectations, enjoying good health, possessing sound financial stability, spending time with family members, leading an unrestricted and joyful life, maintaining good appearances, freedom from disasters, and achieving success in work. Furthermore, this study discusses various definitions of happiness as well as strategies for attaining it. While many conclusions drawn align with findings from previous studies, some distinct insights are also presented herein along with implications and limitations specific to this current study.

Keywords: *Self-Presentation, Happiness View, Social Media, New Year's Wishes, Content Analysis.*

1. Introduction

Happiness is an ancient and evergreen topic. Whether an individual is happy or not is an important yardstick to measure a person's quality of life and psychology, and it is also a continuous driving force to ensure the sustainable development of science and technology, education and social undertakings in a country or region (Bai, 2021). The understanding of happiness is at the core of happiness research, and involves personal and social perceptions of "what constitute a happy life", which includes a set of beliefs, values, attitudes and behavioural intentions related to it (Lu, 2007).

It has been an eternal debate, one which can be traced back to a philosophical discussion of two representative views of happiness, namely, Aristippus's Hedonism and Aristotle's Eudaimonia. Over the past few decades, this research has also evolved from an abstract topic in the philosophical domain to a major issue in the social sciences, where many measurements have been developed to evaluate an individual's level of happiness based on the two views. Categories of measurement include subjective well-being (Diener, 1984), psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989), social well-being (Keyes, 1998), and new measures of well-being (Diener et al., 2009). The evaluation criteria range from individual to societal standards, such as satisfaction with life, the balance of the positive to the negative

affect, positive psychological functioning, the quality of the relationships between individuals, and positive thinking. This series of evaluation criteria is the concrete reflection of the views of happiness, and together construct a happiness cognition system covering many elements.

These ongoing discussions can provide theoretical support for subsequent studies and policies to improve individual happiness. However, happiness is a concept highly rooted in specific cultures and times (Li et al., 2024). The evaluation criteria, such as the focus on relatively high arousal emotions e.g., enjoyment, may reflect a Western cultural bias (Lomas, 2023:58). Perspectives on happiness in different contexts are then discussed, significant examples from the people of China (Lu, 2001), Thailand (Suavansri et al., 2022), and the Netherlands (van der Deijl et al., 2023) contain both universal and culturally unique components of a good life. Such research provides an opportunity to examine happiness outside of academic frameworks, not only taking into account cultural variations but also exploring the nature of happiness from the perspective of the people experiencing it. However, although their research methods vary, their data are all derived from direct statements and expressions of their subjects, which may result in over-reporting of responses that are socially desirable and under-reporting of those responses that are deemed to be socially undesirable/less desirable because of the social desirability bias (Larson, 2019). Therefore, another way in which the subjects' view of happiness is presented, that is, their New Year's wishes, has been proposed in this study.

To wish is to hope that something you want will be made real because of good luck or magical powers. Hoping and wishing quintessentially represent the good and bad aspects of humans' anticipation of the future and the resulting moods of the individual and society (Rosenthal, 1983:45). Summarizing the life course of the past year at the moment of bidding farewell, and making new expectations and visions for the upcoming year, has gradually become an indispensable part of welcoming the new year, forming a "New Year wish culture" in China (Wang, 2022).

According to psychological theory, wishes arise from internal motivations and desires (Ye, 2000:225). People's desires will be transformed into the form of wishes, with more reasonable and more sacred presentation. Desire fulfilment theories, one of the traditional theories of happiness, hold that happiness is a matter of getting what you want (Griffin, 1988), with the content of the want left up to the person who does the wanting. Fulfilment of

a desire contributes to one's happiness. Therefore, the wishes of individuals, to a certain extent, reflect their inner needs and desires, and can be a window and channel to interpret the view of individual happiness.

The advent of social media which allows users to share and communicate independently has made it easier for people to present and express their desires. On social media, the "silent majority" find a stage to show themselves and a space to voice their minds. Their self-presentation on social media is a kind of display, an "exhibition" of the self (Hogan, 2010). The wishes and hopes about the future happiness life that users "display" on social media are as valuable as self-reported measurements of happiness in psychological research. They provide valuable information for the study of individual happiness.

To summarize, scholars have conducted extensive research and debate around the question of what constitutes a happy life, and have formed a series of happiness frameworks covering multiple elements, providing valuable ideas and basis for subsequent research. However, the cognitive systems of happiness constructed have had biases towards Western culture. In follow-up studies, scholars have discussed the view of happiness in different cultures. Yet, although they admit that happiness has a cultural dependency, they can't avoid social desirability bias in self-reports by research objects. On the premises that people are the primary source of personal values and that they present their genuine views on social media, this study delved into individuals' representations of happiness from their New Year's wishes (NYW) on Weibo during the Chinese Lunar New Year. The wishes were analysed with the following two research questions in mind:

- (1) What view of happiness do Chinese people present on social media?
- (2) What are the differences and similarities between the happiness presented on social media and the presentations of happiness found in previous studies?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Chinese People's View of Happiness

Concepts of happiness have a unique history and realistic background in Chinese culture, appearing in various classics and in the speculative thinking

of scholars. In historical literature, happiness can be divided into two kinds: the view of happiness described as *Fu* and the view of happiness described by *Le*.

The ancients used the concept of *Fu* to express the state of happiness and *Le* as the experience of happiness. *Le*, that is, the pursuit of happiness on a spiritual level, is a very important feature of traditional Chinese culture and is a certain state of acquired cultivation. Li (2005:137) considered Chinese culture as a *Le* culture, and proposed that *Le* culture is the cultural psychological structure of the Chinese. For example, “Happiness of Confucius and Yan Hui” embodies an inner joy and happiness obtained from the transcending of material desires (Zhang, 2019). The happiness of contentment with the interdependence of fortune and misfortune constitute the view of happiness in Taoism, which helps people maintain an optimistic and generous attitude in the difficult situations of life. In other words, happiness is a kind of mental insight and spiritual sublimation (Zeng and Guo, 2012).

Fu, a kind of good wishes, is widely used in daily life. In the book “*Shang Shu*” (*The Book of History*), *Fu* is clearly defined in mundane existence to include longevity, prosperity, health and peace, virtue, and a comfortable death (Du, 2018:55). It shows that the core of people’s definition of happiness, at that time, was quality of life. Longevity, health and death are the manifestations of quality of life, whereas prosperity is the material assurance, and virtue can enable one to achieve interpersonal harmony which is also necessary for a good quality of life. This is the simplest and most direct manifestation of people’s pursuit of a happy life. “May the five *Fus* come to your door” is still a popular greeting at Chinese New Year nowadays. To sum up, the happiness represented by *Fu* is peace and perfection in life, with more emphasis on people’s material needs and their satisfaction in real life.

The Chinese view of happiness also has typical collectivist cultural characteristics, especially in highlighting social responsibility and patriotism (Lu and Gilmour, 2007; Steele and Lynch, 2013) and the idea that individuals feel more satisfied and happier with the realization of socially oriented goals (such as honouring elders and social contribution) (Oishi, 2002). Chinese culture attaches importance to harmony and pays more attention to interpersonal support centred on kinship (Lu and Gilmour, 2007). It promotes the ethical norms of orderliness, loyalty and filial piety,

and abiding by the way of getting along based on human feelings.

The scholarly thought provides a clear context for understanding the Chinese view of happiness. However, happiness is a very subjective issue. Some people believe that happiness comes from the satisfaction of material needs, while others think that the experience of happiness comes from the fullness of the spiritual world. This reminds us that to really study what constitutes a happy life, we need to examine the happiness presented by individuals from the point of view of the people experiencing it.

2.2 *The Presentation of Chinese View of Happiness*

There are many explorations of the views of happiness from the perspective of the people experiencing it. For example, Lu (2001, 2007) used a folk psychology approach to explore what Chinese people think about happiness by asking 142 undergraduate students to write free-format essays in response to a simple open-ended question, “What is happiness?” Then he defined happiness from 5 aspects and found that happiness is a harmonious state of existence; the relationship between happiness and unhappiness is dialectical, and happiness can be achieved. Another example is China’s largest media survey on people’s livelihood, *China’s Better Life Survey* (formerly: *China’s Economic Life Survey*), which started in 2006 and has been conducted for many years. 100,000 Chinese families are surveyed about their life experiences, economic conditions, consumption and investment expectations, livelihood difficulties and happiness every year (Baiké, 2023).

Apart from these, discussions of this research are mainly conducted on the media. The significant findings are that the majority of young people in China follow official discourse, inheriting traditional culture, taking morality as the criterion, and pursuing spiritual happiness (Zhang, 2015). Happiness is compared to a car, then family is the “power source” and children is the “engine” (Zhang et al., 2013). Health and peace are the guarantee of happiness and people mainly focus on family members and other kinship, such as their father, mother, and friends (Zhang and Chan, 2019). By combing relevant literature and using in-depth interview methods, Li (2024) extracted five dimensions of views of happiness with national characteristics and times characteristics, namely, material satisfaction, interpersonal support, self-realization, natural harmony, and patriotism.

However, due to limited resources such as layout and time, mass media tend to select the target of news or fall into the process of “typification” (Tuchman, 1973) in terms of their construction method. Some media took scholars, officials, and media as three main discourse subjects in their coverage of happiness to represent the voice of the vast majority of the people (Liu, 2012). The sources of some other media are mainly young people, migrant workers, and farmers (Zhang, 2015). In this way, mass media tends to focus on the group and discussed certain groups’ views on happiness. Thus, it is hard to include the subtle feelings of specific individuals during the coverage (Liao and Qian, 2012). Even worse, the absence of individuals in media coverage has led to an aphasia in their views of happiness (Zhuang, 2019), and subsequent policies to promote happiness at the individual level are naturally not targeted.

As can be seen from the above analysis of literature about what happiness is, due to the limitations of research methods and mediums of presentation, individual subjectivity has not been fully exerted, resulting in the lack of individual voice in findings regarding the recognition and pursuit of happiness, which should have the most say. Therefore, the results of the presentation are mostly at the level of patriotism and family happiness, and there is a lack of detailed description of individual feelings. This study aims to examine individuals’ cognition and pursuit of happiness as completely as possible through a content analysis of the New Year’s wishes expressed by individuals on social media.

3. Methods

3.1 Sample and Procedure

Samples were 1,581 New Year Wishes’ posts from three consecutive years (2021-2023). A python program (Chen et al., 2020) was used to capture the data which contained all of the content from the hashtag #New Year’s Wishes#(#新年心愿#) during 8 p.m. and 12 p.m. on Sina Weibo on Chinese New Year’s Eve, that is, 11th February 2021, 31st January 2022, and 21st January 2023. 784, 414, and 455 items of wish posts were obtained in the three years, respectively. The irrelevant and non-substantive, such as advertisements, were excluded, and 778, 407, and 396 items (total sample size $n=1,581$) were retained at last.

3.2 Content Analysis

This content analysis followed steps proposed by Weber (1990).

3.2.1 Identify the analysis unit

There were two analysis units in this study, the text unit and the recording unit. A text unit is the largest material body to be analysed, and the recording unit is part of the text to which coding categories applies (Smith, 2000). In this study, a text unit was defined as an item or a post of Sina Weibo users' NYW, and the recording unit was defined as a category of post. A text unit can have multiple recording units. For example, a text unit "China will win COVID-19; My family will be happy, safe and healthy; My deposit will exceed one million as soon as possible." would be split into four independent recording units, namely, the categories of environment, mental state, health, and finance. In a word, each recording unit is encoded exclusively into a category (Weber, 1990).

3.2.2 Construct coding scheme

Constructing a coding scheme includes many steps, such as defining the categories, testing coding on a sample, assessing reliability, reviewing coding rules, and repeating if needed.

In order to construct a set of categories that could broadly reflect individuals' self-written NYW, we applied two approaches: prior category and empirical category (Stemler, 2001). After a thorough review and summary of past literature, a prior category, including relationships (Chen, 2003:25; Zheng, 2008:133), circumstances (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005), work (Buettner et al., 2020; Daily, 2023), lifestyle (Buettner et al., 2020; Daily, 2023), mental state (Lu, 2001; Seligman, 2002), health (Luo and Zhao, 2012), finance (Buettner et al., 2020; Liao and Qian, 2012), love (Daily, 2023; Seligman, 2002), and growth (Daily, 2023; Seligman, 2002) was established.

Two individuals with expertise in coding, one serving as the first author and the other as the fourth author, conducted a comprehensive review of the pilot data obtained from the entire sample pool. The objective of this review was to establish a comprehensive coding scheme. Given the substantial size of the sample pool, a total of 159 samples (approximately 10 per cent of the entire sample) were randomly selected for pilot data analysis. This selection

was based on the distribution across three years: 78 samples from 2021, 41 samples from 2022, and 40 samples from 2023. The category “Love” was ultimately excluded due to its overlap with “Relationships”. Additionally, “Circumstances” was modified to “Environment” due to the exclusion of personal circumstances. The category of “Environment” primarily pertains to national or social changes. Considering that there is a significant number of students active on Sina Weibo, the category “Work” was extended to include students as a distinct occupation group. Simultaneously, two new categories, “Good Appearance” and “Hopes and Dreams”, were introduced. The category “Good Appearance” aimed at encoding desires related to beauty standards such as wanting to be attractive or have an ideal body shape/weight; whereas “Hopes and Dreams” encompassed general expectations for future outcomes without specific directions (e.g., hoping everything goes well or dreams come true). Any elements that were difficult to identify or classify comfortably were assigned under a broader category called “General and Others”. Other dimensions that reflect the characteristics of a person’s view of happiness, such as content emphasis, expression tendency, time orientation, and whom they wished were also included.

Based on these considerations, a coding scheme (see Table 1) consisting of 5 dimensions and 22 categories were developed.

Table 1. Coding Scheme

Dimensions	Categories	Instructions	Examples
Wish Content	Relationships	Includes the relationships among family, friends, partners, and general others. It is worth mentioning that this category must focus on the development or maintenance of relationships, not just mentioning them.	Have fun with everyone. I hope that in the new year, there will be someone who will never leave me.
	Environment	Contains national security, social stability, ecological environment health, etc.	Wish the motherland: the country is prosperous and the people are safe.
	Work	Includes workers and students, hopes for promotions, easy work, and no overtime for workers, passing exams, getting high scores, and graduating smoothly for students.	Get a promotion.
	Lifestyle	The quest for a free way of life. Someone's way of living	Do not stay up late.
	Good Appearance	Looks forward to losing weight, exercising, and transforming oneself into an attractive, charming person.	Be thin, be beautiful, and be excellent.
	Mental State	It refers to feelings that are pleasant, energetic, and satisfying, such as joy, love, gratitude, peace, etc.	Happy New Year!
	Health	Without mishaps and the absence of chronic illness, be safe, and peaceful.	May you grow up safe, healthy, and happy.
	Finances	Enough money to meet basic needs, salary increase, and raking in money.	I just want to get richer every day, every year.
	Growth	It refers to the growth and progress of an individual in cognitive, emotional, social adaptation, and other aspects.	The gift of the New Year is to slowly improve myself.
	Hopes and Dreams	Includes hopes in general terms, with no specific categories covered.	I hope that this year's bad will be exchanged for a lucky outbreak in 2023.
	General and Others	Others not mentioned in the above categories	I just found that my New Year's greetings to friends and relatives turned out to be what I instinctively desired.

Dimensions	Categories	Instructions	Examples
Target of Wish	Self	Wish oneself	I hope that my New Year is full of hope.
	Family	Include the whole members or one or some particular members.	I wish my family good health in the New Year.
	Friend	Include the whole members or one or some particular members.	May the life of friends and relatives in the circle of friends be as free as poetry.
	General	Others not mentioned in the above categories or the person who has no clear direction.	I wish everyone the best in the New Year.
Expression Tendency	Positive	Use positive statements to express wishes.	The days are always new, and it is a good year.
	Negative	Use negative or passive statements to express wishes.	With fun, hope, and no trouble.
Time Orientation	Past	Summary and memory of the past.	Forty per cent of what was promised last year came true.
	Present	Summary and memory of the current life or situation.	The fireworks outside the window did not stop, and sitting here watching by the radiator seemed to be the most peaceful moment of my year.
	Future	Hope for the future.	Next year, I hope you all have more honey.
Content Emphasis	Material	Relating to physical objects or special concerns, such as money, food, and clothing basic necessities of life, rather than emotions or the spiritual world.	Have a small family and make a little fortune.
	Spiritual	Something relates to enthusiasm, energy, or courage.	In the new year, I hope my eyes can be filled with sincerity, and my heart can be calmly filled with freedom and love.

3.2.3 Coding process

All data, 1,581 items, were imported into DiVoMiner, an online content analysis and data mining platform. Under the coding scheme, the pilot 159 samples (2021=78, 2022=41, 2023=40, 10 per cent of sample tool) that were randomly chosen from the sample pool were reviewed by two trained coders independently. Posts with inconsistent coding results were discussed until a consensus was reached among both coders. Then the coding rules were reviewed and the weaknesses of the coding scheme were revised. This process was repeated until acceptable reliability, i.e., $\kappa > 0.7$ (Park and Peterson, 2006), was achieved for each category. In this study, κ for each category ranged from 0.78 to 1. After that, two coders operated independently on the DiVoMiner platform to code the whole data together. A database on the views of happiness was thus established, which were quantitatively analysed by relevant tools, and finally, the research findings were obtained.

4. Results

The data used in this study did not contain demographic information like the age and gender of Sina Weibo users due to privacy settings, the incompleteness of personal information presented in their wishes, and technical restrictions. However, public data can be used to gather fundamental general information about the entire group. On the Sina Weibo platform, the share of users who were born in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s age groups is 1 per cent, 3 per cent, 18 per cent, 48 per cent, and 30 per cent, respectively. 54.6 per cent of users are female, and 45.4 per cent of users are male (Data, 2021).

The NYW ranged greatly in length, from 4 words at the shortest to 616 words at the longest. The shortest wish could nevertheless contain useful information. The categories in each dimension were arranged according to their weight in the total sample (see Table 2).

Table 2. Frequency of Each Category

Dimension	Categories	2021	2022	2023	Total
		Frequency*(%)			
Wish Content	Mental State	410 (52.70)	230 (56.51)	228 (57.58)	868 (54.90)
	Hopes and Dreams	290 (37.26)	118 (28.99)	115 (29.04)	523 (33.08)
	Health	231 (29.69)	136 (33.42)	128 (32.32)	495 (31.31)
	Finance	140 (17.99)	62 (15.23)	73 (18.43)	275 (17.39)
	Relationships	133 (17.10)	74 (18.18)	56 (14.14)	263 (16.64)
	Lifestyle	100 (12.85)	77 (18.92)	74 (18.69)	251 (15.88)
	Growth	123 (15.81)	77 (18.92)	8 (12.12)	248 (15.69)
	Environment	86 (11.05)	39 (9.58)	41 (10.35)	166 (10.50)
	Good Appearance	66 (8.48)	28 (6.88)	22 (5.56)	113(7.15)
	Work	50 (6.43)	25 (6.14)	34 (8.59)	112(7.08)
	General and Other	11 (1.41)	7 (1.72)	7 (1.77)	25(1.58)
Target of Wish	Self	529 (67.99)	277 (68.06)	249 (62.88)	1,055 (66.73)
	General	217 (27.89)	112 (27.52)	122 (30.80)	451 (28.53)
	Family	101 (12.98)	65 (15.97)	44 (11.11)	210(13.28)
	Friend	95 (12.21)	28 (6.88%)	24 (6.06)	147(9.30)
Expression Tendency	Positive	749(96.27)	391(96.07)	389(98.23)	1,529 (96.71)
	Negative	106(13.62)	68(16.71)	57(14.39)	231 (14.61)
Time Orientation	Future	763 (98.07)	402 (98.77)	387 (97.73)	1,552 (98.17)
	Present	146 (18.77)	48 (11.79)	68 (17.17)	262 (16.57)
	Past	99 (12.72)	51 (12.53)	46 (11.62)	196 (12.40)
Content Emphasis	Spiritual	651 (83.68)	381 (93.61)	371 (93.69)	1,403 (88.74)
	Material	353 (45.37)	122 (29.98)	109 (27.53)	584 (34.66)

*(N =number of samples; $N_{2021}=778$, $N_{2022}=407$, $N_{2023}=396$, $N_{total}=1,581$)

4.1 Wish Contents

According to Table 2, the Mental State category was the most frequently mentioned among the 11 categories, with over 50 per cent of users referring to it at least once in their wishes. The other two categories in the top three were Hopes and Dreams and Health, each roughly accounting for around 30 per cent. The proportions of the categories of Finance, Relationships, Growth, and Lifestyle were about 15 per cent or so. The category

Environment ranked 8th. The most striking finding in this study was the category with the lowest weightage was Work, which had annual proportions of 6.43 per cent, 6.14 per cent, and 8.59 per cent in 2021, 2022 and 2023 respectively, resulting in a total weight of 7.08 per cent. The proportion of the category General and Other was less than 2 per cent each year, indicating that this empirical category was reasonable (Chen, 2015:164).

The statistical data reflected the focus of users' concerns for happiness, and specific pictures of happiness could be obtained from the content they posted. Considering most of the wishes posted by users were composed of short sentences, this research adopted Word Cloud to examine them and present the results. Word segmentation was chosen to execute word frequency analysis for statistical methods. During the process, certain irrelevant words, e.g., *some*, *a lot of*, *always*, were concealed within the Word Cloud, while words that were related to or belonged to the same family, e.g., *fitness*, *good health*, *be healthy*, were compounded into the word *Health* and presented as a single category in the Word Cloud. The more frequently keywords appeared, the more prominent their visual presentation in the Word Cloud.

Figure 1. Word Cloud of Wish Contents



The Word Cloud (Fig.1) demonstrated the outlines of the happinesses described by social media users in three years. It can be seen that users were relatively content with the status quo from the frequency of these words or phrases, e.g., *go on* (继续 n=80), *better* (更好 n=50), and sentence structure, e.g., *thanks for...* (感谢 n=37), *Comparative + and + the same comparative* (越来越 n=105). However, there were still some *regrets* (遗憾 n=48) and *annoyance* (烦恼 n=35).

In terms of Mental State, *Happy New Year* (新年快乐 $n=1,354$) was the most frequently used word. Most of the posts looked forward to high arousal positive emotions, such as *happy* (快乐 $n=302$), *delighted* (开开心心 $n=191$), *joyful* (喜乐 $n=246$), *glad* (欢愉 $n=46$). Some low arousal positive emotions, such as *woriless*, *relieved*, *content*, *plain*, and *ordinary*, also have a certain amount of mention.

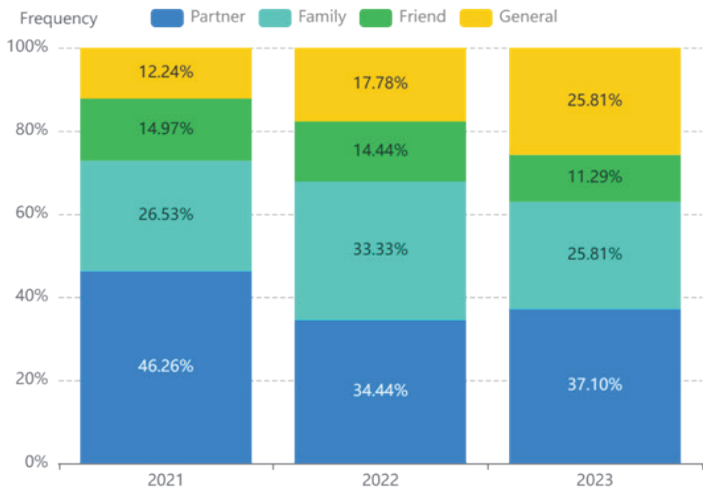
As the second most mentioned category, Hopes and Dreams referred to general visions of the coming future. Some of the most frequent wishes were *Everything goes well* (万事如意 $n=559$), *Everything comes true* (心想事成 $n=103$), *Good luck* (好运 $n=78$), *All the best* (顺利 $n=373$), etc. In the meantime, they also told themselves to continue to *work hard* (加油 $n=60$), and *make great efforts* (努力 $n=119$) in the new year to make these wishes come true.

Regarding the category of Health, users hoped that they could keep healthy and peaceful. *Fitness* (身体健康 $n=588$) and *Safeness* (平安 $n=574$) both had prominent positions in the Word Cloud. The statements such as *free from illness and pain* also were vivid, although they were not displayed on the map.

The frequency of the category Finance was significantly less than the top three categories. Among those who mentioned it, a sudden surge in wealth, described in their posts as *sudden wealth* (暴富 $n=160$) and *making a fortune* (发财 $n=60$), was their single and urgent desire. The wishes “*stock will rise by the daily limit*” in 2021 and “*Funds won’t become green*” in 2022 were some of the concrete ways this desire was expressed, statements that reflected China’s economic situation in those two years. Meanwhile, a steady increase in wealth such as through *a salary increase* was also identified as a good way to become a rich man or achieve financial freedom.

The category of Relationships contained four subcategories. Partner and Family dominated the subcategories at over 60 per cent each year, while the category Friend and General varied slightly from year to year, as shown in Fig. 2.

Figure 2. Frequency of Relationships



As for the picture they painted of the relationships between different groups, *family members* (家人 $n=197$), *parents* (父母 $n=27$), and *babies* (宝宝 $n=29$) played an essential role. In terms of Partner, those who did not have a partner, hoped to *meet their other half* (遇到 $n=73$) and successfully *get out of the single status*. Those with a partner wanted to *be happy forever*. In terms of Family, the most beautiful scene was when *the family members sat leisurely together, having a reunion dinner*. Meeting new friends and getting along well with each other were the common aspirations under Friend and General.

The category of Lifestyle and Growth had rich meanings in users' self-presentation. They cared for living a *free* (自由 $n=48$) and *funny* (有趣 $n=42$) life which can *have an unfettered travel, sleep until wake up naturally or exercise every day*, and then *keep love and move on to the New Year*. In terms of Growth, there were three main aspects. First of all, it was the aspect of acquiring knowledge, e.g., to *read more books, to learn English*. Second, it involved ability training and self-development, e.g., *improvement of painting skill, pass the postgraduate entrance examination* (上岸 $n=72$). The third aspect had to do with personal attitude and ideological state in life, e.g., to *let the past go and take what happens in stride, to be a little sun with love in the heart and light in the eyes*, etc. The ultimate goal of growth was to *become a better person*.

The content of the Environment category focused mainly on the national and social dimensions. The words that appeared in the Word Cloud were pandemic (疫情 $n=60$) and *be safe and sound* (长安 $n=27$). The expectations of *an early end to COVID-19, prosperity of the country, peace of the people, and no disasters or difficulties* were the underlying colours of their happy life.

In terms of the category of Good Appearance and Work, their aspirations were relatively simple. *To lose weight/become thin, to become beautiful, and to have no baldness* were among the basic common pursuits. *Go smoothly in work* (工作顺利 $n=60$), *Less overtime*, and *Passing exams* were the most common wishes for both those who were already working and students.

4.2 Wish Whom?

Targets of wishes were made up of four categories. As listed in Table 1, the Self category (66.73 per cent) is at the top, followed by the General category (28.53 per cent), Family category (13.28 per cent) and Friend category (9.3 per cent), which is contrary to the research results of the Relationship category in the dimension of wish content. I should note that the definition of the “General” category mentioned above differs from the category “General and Other” within the analysis of Wish Content, whereby “General” in the analysis of Target of Wish indicates that there was no clear target because of collective pronouns such as “everybody”, and “everyone” in the wishes. From the Word Cloud, the most prominent words indicating targets of wishes were *oneself* (自己 $n=447$), followed by *everyone* (大家 $n=324$), *we* (我们 $n=285$), *the family* (家人 $n=197$), and then *friend* (朋友 $n=75$).

4.3 Expression Tendency

Expression tendency contained two categories: positive and negative statements. One wish may cover both. The proportion of positive statements varied little in the three years, all of which were above 96 per cent. However, negative statements also had a certain proportion, around 15 per cent each year, which formed an appealing picture of happiness.

In terms of the content contained in negative statements, all categories of Wish Content except the category of General and Other, were mentioned (see Table 3). The category of Environment had the highest cumulative occurrence (43) across the three years, being the most frequent category

of negative statements in 2022 (n=14), 2023 (n=11), and ranking second in 2021 (n=18). Mental State (n=34) and Good Appearance (n=30) came next in the overall rankings. Relationships (n=28) ranked fifth, and Finance (n=11) and Work (n=6) came in second last and last. The content of the negative statements included the early end of the epidemic, experiencing less trouble, losing weight, having no insomnia, not caring about the evaluation of the outside world, escaping singledom, wishing no disease, no disaster, no lack of money, and less overtime.

Table 3. Frequency of Negative Statements

Category	2021	2022	2023	Total
Environment	18	14	11	43
Mental State	17	7	10	34
Good Appearance	18	9	3	30
Lifestyle	8	12	9	29
Relationships	19	4	5	28
Future	13	6	9	28
Growth	13	8	4	25
Health	4	6	4	14
Finance	2	4	5	11
Work	2	3	1	6
Total	114	73	61	248

4.4 Time Orientation

The dimension of time orientation contained three categories: Future, Present, and Past. It was not surprising that the proportion of Future was close to 100 per cent (2021=98.07 per cent, 2022=98.77 per cent, 2023=97.73 per cent), which meant this category was mentioned by almost all of the sample users. Curiously, both the Present and Past categories were also mentioned by quite a large number of people, 16.57 per cent and 12.40 per cent respectively of the total in the three years.

4.5 Content Emphasis

Content emphasis was analysed through the two categories of Spiritual and Material. The category Spiritual was mentioned in users' wishes at over 83 per cent. Material also accounted for a certain proportion, reaching at least

27.53 per cent each year (see Table 1). It showed that spiritual and material pursuits both held importance in users' future picture, but the proportion of spiritual pursuits was far higher than the material.

5. Discussion

As previously established, views on happiness are subjective, with cultural tendency. This study focused on two topics, that is, the presentations of Chinese people's views of happiness on social media, and how they compare with findings from previous studies. To examine Chinese people's view of happiness, our content analysis studied 1,581 NYW posted by users on Chinese social media.

5.1 The Self-Presentation of Happiness

The presentation of Chinese people's concepts of happiness includes two aspects, the dimensions of the happiness wished for on social media, and the definitions of happiness. The former is based on results of Wish Content, Expression Tendency, and Target of Wish, while the latter relates to results of Wish Content, Time Orientation, and content emphasis.

5.1.1 Dimensions of happiness

The results of wish content in Table 2 and the Word Cloud show that Chinese people were satisfied with the status quo when they posted NYW, and their view of happiness has ten dimensions, namely, mental state, hopes and dreams, health, finance, relationships, lifestyle, growth, environment, good appearance, and work.

To be more specific, the findings show that Chinese people look forward to being in a positive mental state, including both high and low arousal positive emotions. Facing the coming future, they are hopeful that their wishes will be realized and are willing to work hard for it. As one of their top three concerns, health and safety are their consistent pursuits. Compared with the above topmost three, although Chinese people's demand for wealth is significantly less, and the relevant bright words in the Word Cloud also indicate that Chinese people's pursuit of wealth is no longer to meet the basic needs of life, but to hope for material prosperity.

In terms of relationships, the wishes about various relationships (Fig. 2) and the relationships between the wisher and whom they wish in

Table 2 show that Chinese people attach great importance to both family members and ordinary people. As for the dimensions of lifestyle and good appearance, almost all concerns were for becoming thin and beautiful or living freely. With regard to growth, whether it is the increase or acquisition of knowledge, the development of abilities, or the improvement of one's spiritual level, it is the development planning that people do based on their individual needs, focusing on the realization and development of individual potential.

The dimension of environment in this study contains two aspects, that is, nature harmony and patriotism. The former is for the ecological environment, and the latter is for the country. At the same time, the results in Table 3 showed that the biggest concern of negative statements in the three years studied is the problem of the environment, and more specifically, the COVID-19 pandemic. Users in the data called for *an early end to the pandemic*. As to the dimension of work, it had the lowest portion of wishes whether in positive or negative statements. The desires around work were relatively simple - it was to work smoothly, or to have no overtime.

5.1.2 Definitions of happiness

Happiness is such a subjective concept that no one can give it a complete, one-size-fits-all definition. However, a certain consensus can be derived from the results of the NYW studied.

5.1.2.1 Happiness is a state of being better than before

According to the results of Time Orientation, although they were New Year's wishes and a hope for the future, there still were many posts that referred to the two time dimensions of the past and the present. The results show that Chinese people have a propensity to contrast their desired happiness with the past. First off, despite some posts comparing one's own life to that of others, they have a clear tendency to compare themselves to their former selves or to their own former circumstances. They want to be *better and better, more and more gentle/beautiful, richer and richer, etc., the more live, the younger they will be, and can do more and more meaningful things in the coming year*. In other words, as long as one's self or state today is better than it was yesterday, one will be content and happy. Second, Chinese people exhibited a propensity towards vertical comparisons in terms of time. The conditions

of “the old one/year” served as the reference to build their aspirations and the standards to measure whether they reach the goals in the future, as in their desires, such as *Every year is better than ever, May the New Year be better than the old one*. In a nutshell, the comparison standard also includes the circumstances of the previous year.

5.1.2.2 *Happiness is a mental state with positive emotions*

According to the results of the Word Cloud of the category of Mental state, words associated with high arousal positive emotions like happiness, joyfulness, and delight were predominant compared to mentions of low arousal positive emotion which were relatively scarce. It indicated that experiencing high arousal affect was a significant aspect of happiness. Undoubtedly, culture plays a vital role in shaping the understanding of a happy life, that is, people in Western cultures tend to experience high arousal emotions, while Chinese people’s desired state of happiness is more peaceful. However, the link between desired positive emotions and the age of the sample population who were mostly born in the 1990s and 2000s reveal that there might be a relationship between the desired mental state and age. For young people with less life experience and more exposure to fun and exciting events, especially in an environment where the pace of industrialization has accelerated significantly, the pursuit of high arousal positive emotions is the meaning of happiness.

The difference in the desired mental state between different ages is a reminder of the role age plays during the formation process of one’s view of happiness, as well as of the scope of findings of this study, which uses data mainly from people who were born in the 1990s and 2000s. This points out a way towards further research. When measuring people’s perceived happiness (e.g., mostly subjective well-being in past research) or exploring their views of happiness, not only cultural factors should be taken into account, but an analysis of age differences should also be put on the research agenda.

5.1.2.3 *Happiness is a state of satisfaction of spiritual fulfilment*

The statistical data of content emphasis in Table 2 show that Chinese people care more about spiritual pursuits than material ones. But there is no denying that three of these categories, that is, Finance, Lifestyle, and Good Appearance, are related to material pursuits. When the statistics were

put together with the Word Cloud, it can be found that there is a strong correlation between these material pursuits and the spiritual. The pursuit of a free lifestyle and good appearance ultimately leads to spiritual pleasure and satisfaction. In terms of finance, the desire for sudden wealth beyond basic necessities actually satisfies not the material level, but the spiritual level of security and contentment. Therefore, in the context of material abundance, instead of focusing on whether the weight of the material and spiritual wishes changes, it is better to find answers to these questions such as what people's material needs are and what the relationships between the material and spiritual pursuits are.

5.1.2.4 Improvement of oneself is a main way to attain happiness

An unavoidable question in any view of happiness is how to attain happiness. In the users' wishes, there were three main aspects through which to improve themselves, from the primary level of learning and acquisition of knowledge, the middle-level of ability training and development, to the high-level of personal ideological cultivation. The improvement of knowledge reserves, ability levels and realm levels is not only a process of getting closer to happiness, but also the inevitable result of happiness realization.

5.2 Similarities and Differences Between the Previous Studies

5.2.1 Similarities

From the perspective of the dimensions that comprise happiness, the findings of the five dimensions, that is, mental state, future hope, health, growth, and environment are basically consistent with previous studies, reflecting the inheritance of the *five Fus* from traditional culture (Hong, 2021:21) and people's attention to nature and country (Mu, 2023). From the perspective of definitions of happiness, the pursuit of positive emotion, especially the correlation with age (Mogilner et al., 2011), attention to the spiritual level, and ways to attain happiness, are consistent with previous research (Ren, 2023; Wang, 2021). However, there are still some differences to explore.

5.2.2 Differences

The dimensions of finance and relationships are slightly different from previous studies, the work dimension is contradicts prior literature, and

lifestyle and good appearance are new dimensions that haven't been explicitly proposed before.

5.2.2.1 *Finance: Hope for material prosperity*

Wealth is the guarantee and basis of a happy life (Walker, 2016:124). For a long time, whether it is the fortune in the five Fuses, or the modern Chinese view of happiness, in the economy, the only emphasis was to meet the basic material needs (Li et al., 2024; Xie, 2020). In this study, the bright words such as “*sudden wealth*”, “*making a fortune*” in the Word Cloud indicate that Chinese people's pursuit of wealth is no longer to meet the basic needs of life, but to hope for material prosperity. This also reflects the current situation of China's material economy and people's livelihood.

5.2.2.2 *Relationship: Two sets of logic*

In terms of the dimension of relationships, compared with the broad description of interpersonal harmony (Li et al., 2024) and the simple focus on family happiness (Zhang et al., 2013) (Zhang and Chan, 2019) in previous studies, the results of this study indicated that Chinese people have a more delicate distinction and pursuit in interpersonal relationships. The data of “frequency of relationships” in figure 2 and “target of wish” in Table 2 suggested that there are two seemingly contradictory sets of logic in their description of wishes in this dimension: When it comes to the development and maintenance of relationships, the first set of logic comes into play, where the partner is superior to the family, the friend comes in the third, and the general category is the least important of the lot. It is a pattern of people who are close first and then people who are distant. When it comes to the targets of wish, the relationships between different targets are ranked from (excluding the self) the general category, to family, then friends, which is a pattern of distant to close, that is, a second set of logic. In short, Chinese people follow the basic principle of Differential Mode of Association (Fei, 1998:86) and have different demands and desires for different social relationships.

5.2.2.3 *Work: Little attention*

The biggest difference is in the work dimension. The finding that Chinese people pay little attention to work (both wish content in Table 2 and negative

statement in Table 3) in their wishes contradicts the claims of past studies that work was one of the main influencing domains of subjective well-being (Diener et al., 2018), or the way to greater happiness (Buettner et al., 2020), although they didn't point out their correlation directly. Some surveys conducted in China also showed the great relevance between work and happiness. For example, stress at work and in the workplace is the biggest cause of the loss of happiness (TV and Group, 2009). Excessive work pressure is the main cause of their unhappiness (Shi, 2014:97). One possible reason is a change in financial resources. In the past, as the main or even the only source of living, the issues of work such as whether to work or not, and how much was the salary, had a significant impact on the lives of individuals and even whole families. Nowadays, the diversification of financial sources makes people no longer regard work as a tool and necessity to support their families, coupled with factors such as high work pressure, therefore the attention paid to them has naturally declined. Another possibility for this difference is in terms of the age of the participants and, more specifically, the lifestyle of the group of participants. There is a phrase in China that the post-1990s generation has arrived to improve the workplace. It indicates that they desire to operate under their own norms rather than imposed ones. Work is only one of their many lifestyle choices. In such a background, the focus of further research can be shifted to the study of the meaning of work.

5.2.2.4 New dimensions: lifestyle and good appearance

Dimensions of lifestyle and good appearance have never been significantly included in previous studies. Lifestyle is a dimension that studies have covered in the past (such as the assessment of life satisfaction in subjective well-being) but not deeply. In this dimension, the desires expressed by individuals mainly point to a free way of life. The rising proportion of the frequency of Lifestyle category between 2022 and 2023 revealed the influence of external environment (such as pandemic control in this study) on the pursuit of individual's happiness, and also indicated that the understanding of happiness a dynamic construction process. As for good appearance, almost all concern for it is becoming thin and beautiful. The reason may be traced to the frame of reference provided by the media. A recent study has shown that TV shows have a significant impact on college students dress habits, travel and leisure, shopping and consumption, and enhance college students' pursuit of quality of life and their desire to buy

luxury goods (Deng and Chen, 2014). Some implicit values in American TV series, such as material supremacy, sexual openness, personal heroism, can easily affect the formation of college students' values (Zhou, 2020).

From the perspective of definitions of happiness, in a slight departure from previous research, this study finds that users defined happiness as a state of being compared to one's past. According to social comparison theory, there are different kinds of comparisons, including vertical and horizontal, i.e. with others or with one's own past (Suls and Wheeler, 2012). The findings in this study indicated that Chinese people have a propensity towards vertical comparisons. This is different from previous research showing that Chinese people tend to make horizontal comparisons with others (Xu, 2015). The research of Cai et al. (2020) offered a possible reason: individualism in general is on the rise. Therefore, multicultural coexistence will be an important feature of Chinese society today and in the future.

5.3 General Implications and Further Study

While analyzing the dimensions of Chinese people's view of happiness, this study points out the similarities and differences with previous studies in the dimensions of finance, relationship and work, puts forward two new dimensions of lifestyle and good appearance, which more comprehensively represent Chinese people's view of happiness in the present under the multi-culture, and provides possible path choices for better realization of individual happiness. In view of the finding that the significance of the work dimension is contrary to previous studies, the meaning of work should be further explored.

At the same time, on the basis of summarizing the definition and understanding of Chinese people's concept of happiness, this study also points out the direction of future research. For example, in the follow-up discussion on the measurement of individual happiness and concept of happiness, besides considering the influence factor of culture, the desired emotional state of happiness and the difference of age should also be taken into account. In addition, in today's extremely rich material, the focus of research should be separated from the dichotomy of material and spiritual pursuit, and more attention should be paid to the material needs of the current Chinese people, and the connection between these material needs and spiritual pursuit.

5.4 Limitations

A thousand people have a thousand understandings of happiness. Given the highly subjective nature of happiness, it is difficult to capture every individual's thoughts in the generalization of our findings. Although our data come from the most widespread social media platform in China, each platform has its characteristics and tendencies. The majority of active users of Sina Weibo were born in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, which means that the sample of the study may not cover all ages evenly. This reminds us that the application of research findings should be particularly cautious to consider their scope, and the correlation between findings should be tested by introducing some variables in further studies.

The method of content analysis can overcome the interference of measurement behaviour on study subjects, however, the challenge of information bias caused by factors such as the impression management function of social media still exists. The comparison of three years of data, rather than only one year in this study, is expected to solve this problem to a large extent.

At the same time, it is necessary to acknowledge the limitation of the period of data collection in this study. During the period of data collection, the pandemic severely influenced Chinese people's lives, which may have had some impact on their presentation of NYW.

6. Conclusions

Happiness is a subjective concept that encompasses diverse understandings and interpretations among thousands of individuals. This study delved into the views of Chinese people on happiness by conducting a content analysis of self-presentation NYW shared on social media platforms. Through an in-depth exploration of the presentation of Chinese people's views of happiness, ten dimensions, namely, mental state, future hope, health, finance, relationship, lifestyle, growth, environment, good appearance, and work, are summarized. Building upon these dimensions of the views of Chinese people on happiness, we define happiness as a mental state characterized by positive emotions, growth surpassing previous levels, and the satisfaction of spiritual fulfilment. At last, new characteristics of happiness were pointed out, such as the pursuit of an affluent life, less attention to work, the adoption of two sets of logic in interpersonal relationships, an increase in attention to

lifestyle and good appearance, and a greater emphasis on comparing oneself to oneself in the definition of happiness. To enhance decision-makers' ability to promote individual happiness effectively, further research should focus on delineating age-specific perspectives on happiness due to variations found in positive emotions experienced. In the meanwhile, the meaning of work should be further explored, as well as the interplay between materialistic pursuits and spiritual enrichment. However, the findings of this study have to be seen in light of some limitations, such as the breadth of research sample representation, the impression management function of social media, and the period of data collection.

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Book Review

Maria Francesca Staiano. *Chinese Law and Its International Projection: Building a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind*. Singapore: Springer, 2023. 74 Pages. ISBN 978-981-19-9577-4.

Maria Francesca Staiano's book "Chinese Law and Its International Projection" provides a comprehensive yet succinct overview and analysis of the evolution of Chinese law, examining both its traditional historical roots as well as its modern development under the influence of international law. Published as part of Springer's "Understanding China" series, the book explores how international law has served as a "pioneer" in shaping China's domestic legal system while also analysing how Chinese law now projects back outwards to influence international law and relations.

The book is divided into six chapters, moving from an examination of traditional elements in Chinese law, to the role of international law, to the contemporary development of a socialist rule of law system with "Chinese characteristics", to the concept of building a "community with a shared future for mankind", to Chinese theories of international relations, and concluding with a discussion of legal symbols.

Chapter One examines foundational components of traditional Chinese law, based heavily on Confucian thought and ethics. Concepts such as *Renqing* (humanised obligations in relationships), *Lian* (moral integrity), and *Mianzi* (social prestige) underline a humanistic spirit focused on social harmony. The ritual legacy (*Li*) persists as a counterweight to codified laws (*Fa*), though reforms have tried integrating the two. Western conceptions of the rule of law and human rights have also influenced legal development. Staiano effectively argues that Chinese law represents an accumulation of traditional values, foreign concepts, and international norms.

Chapter Two analyses how international law served as a "pioneer" in constructing China's contemporary domestic legal framework, beginning from the Opium Wars period onwards. International agreements, especially on human rights, drove major domestic legal reforms across issue areas like gender and disability rights. Staiano argues that this affirms Chinese international legal scholar Liu Huawen's argument that human rights law

has “pioneered” Chinese legislative evolution, functioning as a “tool of legal culture” (p.15). There remains a complex osmosis between external norms and localised adaptation and interpretation.

The third chapter examines China’s development of a “socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics”. Staiano effectively charts key reforms, especially constitutional amendments codifying this principle, and structural legal hierarchies. She also highlights unique aspects like the coexistence of state legislation alongside societal customary norms. An important analysis also covers the recently introduced Civil Code, representing a major milestone in Chinese legal coherence, with innovative humanistic elements.

Chapter Four connects domestic legal development to the parallel promotion internationally of constructing a “community with a shared future for mankind”. This concept, pioneered by China but with global resonance, underpins proposals like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and represents a fundamental reimagining of international relations. The expressions of “relationality”, “human authority”, and “symbiosis” in Chinese thought substantiate this, offering tangible alternatives to status quo power dynamics. There remain however some questions about the feasibility of operationalising these ambitious visions.

Building on that, Chapter Five provides an overview of key Chinese schools of international relations theory, like Yan Xuetong’s moral realist “Tsinghua Approach” (p. 62). Qin Yaqing’s “relational theory” highlights intersubjective interactions and complex interdependence (p. 61). So too the idea of an “international symbiosis system” where cooperation supersedes competition (p. 63-64). Moreover, China’s proposal to build a “community with a shared future for mankind” calls for shared norms and mutual responsibilities between states and societies (p. 64). Staiano compellingly argues that these constitute genuine innovations from Chinese perspectives that question long unchallenged assumptions in the field.

The concluding chapter reemphasises the profound connections between law, culture, language, and meaning. Staiano provocatively argues that Chinese inputs into international law can catalyse a necessary disruption of existing legal paradigms and move towards a new shared community. This represents the strongest element of the book, in calling for non-Western traditions to appropriately reshape what remains a Western-centric conception of international law and relations. This book thus serves as a penetrating contribution towards those shifts.

The book's strengths lie in its comprehensive scope, spanning a diverse range of issues related to Chinese law, from historical analysis to contemporary institutions to theories of international relations. It effectively bridges domestic and international spheres and disciplines. Staiano demonstrates an expansive expertise across these subjects. The book also excels in centring Chinese perspectives and grounding analysis in the Chinese source material, from government white papers to academic theories. This contextualisation is invaluable for understanding the true meanings and logics behind facets of China's legal and political system which can confound external observers.

In terms of weaknesses, there are times when the ambitious breadth of the book also leaves some areas wanting for more in-depth elaboration or critique. The length of the book evidently limits such deeper analysis. More importantly, while Staiano's work analyses Chinese legal philosophy and its global impacts, it has some empirical and analytical gaps that future scholarship could help address. For one, the book relies heavily on theoretical discussion without sufficient case-based evidence demonstrating real-world legal applications. Incorporating concrete examples and data tracking how legislators and judges employ these philosophical principles domestically could bolster its claims about Chinese law's functionality. Furthermore, the book would benefit from more critical examination of tensions between traditional theory and contemporary practice, especially for politically sensitive issues like human rights or anti-corruption efforts. Engaging directly with thorny cases that challenge the legal order's internal coherence and global standing could ultimately strengthen the author's coverage of adaptations enabling continuity with centuries-old traditions.

Additionally, although comprehensively synthesising primary Chinese texts and concepts, the book does not sufficiently account for the latest legal developments or integrate perspectives from other Chinese scholars. For instance, detailed analysis of recent Civil Code provisions, BRI agreements, and virus containment policies could reveal nuances around navigating global integration amidst growing nationalist sentiments. Moreover, contextualising the author's interpretations against contrasting academic positions would enrich the debate regarding Chinese law's communitarian versus authoritarian aspects. Ultimately, augmented engagement with emerging issues and alternative views would reinforce the book's utility for understanding this complex, rapidly changing landscape.

Overall, however, the book represents an exceptionally versatile contribution across multiple disciplines related to Chinese law. It bridges theory and practice, the historical and contemporary, local groundings and international projections. The book constitutes a valuable resource for anyone studying China's legal system or foreign policy, while also pushing much-needed pluralisation in the fields of law and international relations. Staiano thus provides a unique perspective that aims to facilitate genuine intercultural dialogue, towards the very "community with a shared future" envisioned by China itself. This accessible but multidimensional examination of Chinese law merits a wide readership across academia, policy, media, and civil society.

*Review by Shisong Jiang
School of Law
Chongqing University, China*