

When Dragon meets Nāga,

the study of strategic narratives of China's Buddhist Diplomacy in Thailand after the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the strategic use of narratives in Chinese Buddhist public diplomacy to support the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Thailand. This study examines the different levels of narrative formation, including system, identity, and issue narratives, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms that drive communication, persuasion, and influence in international affairs. Thesis argues that the Chinese government strategically employs narratives surrounding Buddhism and exchanges between Thailand and China as a means to bolster their BRI projects, cultivate a favourable perception of China, and strengthen the existing bilateral relations. The findings indicate that the Chinese government has been utilising Southern Buddhism as transnational religion to promote the BRI and to find common ground with Thailand in their discourse. Consequently, the strategic use of narratives helps to reduce negative perceptions of China's influence in Thailand. However, the effectiveness of Chinese influence is mediated by national identity. The thesis concludes that the narrative is linked to China's national development strategy and is presented in the context of Chinese politics and society. The study goes beyond traditional soft power analyses to provide a more nuanced understanding of how complex interactions and strategic narratives that shape international relations.

Key words:

Sino-Thai relations, soft power, public diplomacy, Belt and Road Initiative, Southern Buddhism, Strategic narratives

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Abbreviations

BAC	Buddhist Association of China
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CRI	China Radio International
LMC	Lancang – Mekong Countries
NPC	National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China
PRC	The People's Republic of China
SARA	State Administration of Religious Affairs of the People's Republic of China
UFWD	The United Front Work Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party
CRI	China Radio International
OBOR	One Belt One Road
TA	Thematic Analysis

1. Title

When Dragon meets Nāga¹: Strategic Narratives of China's Buddhist Diplomacy in Thailand after the Implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative.

2. Introduction and aim of the thesis

While not an official state ideology, there are more Buddhists in China than in any other country in the world (Scott, 2016, p. 114). Buddhism is a significant cultural and religious resource that China utilises to build a positive image of the country worldwide. In particular, by emphasizing shared values and beliefs with other countries in the Mekong subregion², China aims to reduce tensions and build cooperation (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p. 62). This thesis investigates one example of this practice through an exploration of the use of Buddhism by the Chinese government to promote the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Thailand.

Scholars have argued that religion is considered a diplomatic resource for the Chinese government to promote international understanding of China as well as “to advocate China’s actions regarding religions, improve China’s image, and build a harmonious world” (Seib, 2013, p. 83). It is well-known that China has used Buddhism as a form of soft power to enhance cooperation with countries in the Mekong subregion (J. Zhang, 2012, p. 23), particularly in support of China’s economic and strategic interests. This had been done through the cooperation with local Buddhist institutions and leaders to advance its agenda. However, this collaboration poses a challenge to the autonomy and authenticity of Buddhism in the region (Raymond, 2020, p. 346). Miskimmon et al. (2013) have shown that the Chinese government's use of Buddhism aims to reduce tensions and adverse effects of the BRI projects and to build a positive image of China highlighting “past glories and formative peaceful periods of development” in these countries (p. 62).

The use of strategic narratives by states is an essential means of persuasion to attain strategic advantages, highlighting the importance of understanding the interplay between religion and international politics. This study aims to explore the strategic narratives of

¹ Known as *Phaya nak* or *Phaya nāga*, a sea-serpent-like mythological creature in Hindu and Buddhist folklore originated from India but has long been influenced Thai tradition and society. Nāga was named the national symbol of Thai culture in November 2022.

² Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.

China's Buddhist diplomacy in Thailand after the implementation of the BRI (2013 to 2022). The thesis asks: "How has the Chinese government utilised Buddhism to support the BRI in Thailand?" and argues that the Chinese government have used and engaged with strategic narratives on the history of Buddhism and exchanges between the Thailand and China to support the BRI projects and enhance their existing bilateral relations.

While this study aims to shed light on the role of Buddhism as a tool of Chinese public diplomacy focusing on the case of Thailand, it could benefit research on other areas. For example, those interested in using the analytical framework of strategic narratives to study Buddhism as a tool of diplomacy under the BRI in mainland Southeast Asian countries, such as Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, or Singapore, located on the 21st century 'Maritime Silk Road'.

The study contributes to the understanding of strategic narratives and their role in shaping international relations in the context of the BRI. The findings reveal that the narratives on Buddhism are formed through political institutions such as State Administration of Religious Affairs of the People's Republic of China, United Front Work Department of China (UFWD), the Buddhist Association of China and the Chinese government, and centre around China's rising power and participation in global affairs through the BRI.

The structure of this thesis is as follows: The first chapter provides background information and contextualizes the research problem. In the second chapter, the research field is explored and previous research in the area is reviewed including the identification of the research gap. The third chapter presents the theoretical framework that informs this study. The fourth chapter details the methods and empirical materials used, including the research question and sub-questions. The fifth chapter discusses the ethical considerations and limitations involved in the research. The sixth chapter presents the data analysis and discussion. Finally, the thesis concludes with a summary of the findings and their implications.

3. Background and context of the research problem

The BRI and its significance

The BRI, in Chinese 一帶一路 (One-Belt-One-Road), was proposed by Xi Jinping, the President of PRC, in 2013 (*Promote Friendship Between Our People and Work Together to Build a Bright Future*, 2013). It is an economic, diplomatic, and cultural exchange plan (Yu, 2017, p. 117) that integrates both the land connectivity known as the "Belt" that is a land-based "Silk Road Economic Belt" (絲綢之路經濟帶) and maritime connectivity known as the "Road" which is the sea-based "Maritime Silk Road of the 21st Century" (21世紀海上絲綢之路) (Lim et al., 2016). Kunming (China) – Thailand and Vietnam – Malaysia - Singapore is one of "the Belt" aspects of the project of six transcontinental high-speed railway and highway networks (P. Lee, 2021, p. 20). According to Yu (2017), the success of China's BRI initiative largely depends on the support and involvement of its Southeast Asian neighbours. Meanwhile, Southeast Asian countries need to prioritize regional economic integration to counteract external uncertainties and global economic vulnerabilities as well as to concentrate on constructing infrastructure. Taking part in the BRI program as it is regarded as a means of addressing the region's infrastructure deficiencies and speeding up industrial and economic growth (pp. 117–118).

Thailand's strategic location and its extensive infrastructure network make it a significant player in the construction of the BRI. Situated at the centre of mainland Southeast Asia, Thailand serves as a crucial link between China and other ASEAN countries via a land connection with Laos, Myanmar, Malaysia, Cambodia, as well as maritime routes in the Andaman Sea (connecting to India) and Gulf of Thailand (connecting to Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Singapore). Since 2015, China has expanded its BRI projects beyond physical infrastructure, with the establishment of the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) forum. The LMC has publicly stated that its founding, meetings, agreements, and initiatives fall under the scheme of the BRI, which has raised concerns about Chinese influence in addition to its economic, security, and geopolitical interests (Zawacki, 2021).

China's BRI projects and concerns related to the BRI's projects in Thailand

China pushed the Thai government to accept their original plan of constructing a high-speed rail line for passengers and cargo at a top speed of 180 kph, and even signed an agreement to this effect in 2015. However, by the time construction commenced in 2017,

Thailand changed its stance and expressed dissatisfaction with the conditions of high interests rate offered by Chinese government and Thailand didn't want to borrow 100 percent loan from China (Mahitthirook, 2015). Thailand was dissatisfied with China's insistence on using Chinese materials and workers for the project which would benefit only the Chinese government and businesses rather than Thailand (Ghoshal, 2022). Moreover, Thailand's academics, civil servants, and politicians have expressed negative views on China's BRI strategy and expressed distrust due to China's past image, including concerns about China's technology, particularly its safety. The most significant fear among them was that China's BRI was a plan to dominate Thailand (Punyaratabandhu & Swaspitchayaskun, 2021, p. 69). As a consequence, Prime Minister Prayuth was not invited to join China's inaugural Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in 2017. However, Thailand was able to negotiate a settlement regarding the engineers and receive a significant amount of technology transfer from China (Zawacki, 2021).

Another important incident was the cancellation of the Lancang-Mekong Navigation Channel Improvement Project which was initially agreed to in 2016. However, the decision was reversed in 2019 due to protests led by Thai civil society organizations and local community groups (Deetes, 2020). The main reason for the cancellation, according to Thai and foreign officials, was due to concerns about the river's "thalweg," which refers to the primary navigable channel that defines the boundary between two countries (in this case, Thailand, and Laos). As a result, Thailand could lose a portion of its territory to Laos. Despite this, both the Thai and Chinese governments publicly cited civil society's concerns about the environment, food security, culture, livelihoods, and ecology as the main reason for the cancellation. However, Thai civil society clearly identified the blasting project as being driven by China and actively opposed it, successfully halting the activity (Zawacki, 2021).

The recent case related to the BRI projects is the dam building on the Mekong river in Thailand and Laos namely the new Pak Beng dam project and the completed Xayaburi hydropower dam (Ngamkham, 2017). Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, one of the public Buddhist Universities in Thailand, published an article "No River, No Peace: Buddhist along the Mekong River" on its website raising concerns and criticising the dam-building projects over the Mekong River as human actions causing harm to various species in the river, as they attempt to control and develop the river for hydro-electric dam schemes, leading to environmental degradation. There are more sustainable alternatives that should be implemented, such as solar energy, which is less harmful to the environment. For over a

millennium, the Buddhist population and the river have had a long relationship - when the river flows, so does Buddhism (Dhammadasa & Peoples, 2018).

Religious Belt and Road as a solution?

The BRI has extended its influence in the realm of religion in Thailand. Gregory Raymond (2020) published a report titled “Religion as a Tool of Influence: Buddhism and China's Belt and Road Initiative in Mainland Southeast Asia.” The report provides evidence that the BRI is expanding to include people-to-people connections as one of its official goals, specifically through Buddhism in mainland Southeast Asia (Zawacki, 2021).

Religions serve a constructive role in societal development and have long been an important institution that shapes politics, societies, and people’s lives worldwide, through embodying good ideals, and helps to grow a harmonious community (Seib, 2013, p. 17). Since the implementation of the BRI, religion has been gradually prioritized as one of China’s public diplomacy strategies. Buddhism became a tool under the control of the United Front Work Development (UFWD) for the Chinese government to build influence and a sense of shared values between southern China and mainland Southeast Asia (Ranade, 2017, p. 1; Raymond, 2020, pp. 346–348). The UFWD is the most powerful actor and plays a central role in managing the party’s relations with non-party groups and religious communities, including the Buddhist Association of China (BAC). As a result, the global promotion of Chinese Buddhism has been recognized by the National People's Congress of the People’s Republic of China (NPC) as a key component to “tell the Chinese story well” to foreigners so they could realize China’s accomplishments and peaceful intentions. These efforts were referred to as soft power and “person-to-person diplomacy as well as linked to the BRI” (Ashiwa & Wank, 2020, p. 4).

Consequently, China organized the 1st Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) Leaders’ Meeting in Sanya, China in 2016. At the meeting LMC leaders agreed to promote social, cultural and people-to-people exchange as well as to “explore the possibility of building a Lancang-Mekong cultural exchange platform, give full play to the role of cultural centers set by governments and carry out various forms of cultural exchanges” (Sanya Declaration of the First Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) Leaders’ Meeting, 2016). At the same time, the State Administration of Religious Affairs of the People's Republic of China (SARA) began drafting the concept paper on the Regular Exchanges mechanism between Governmental Departments of Religious Affairs of Lancang-Mekong Countries as a new religious device among the Lancang-Mekong countries in 2017.

For Thailand, although Buddhism is not recognized as the state religion, it holds significant influence across all sectors and levels of Thai society. This is exemplified in chapter 2 - section 7 of the 2017 Constitution of Thailand stating that “The King is a Buddhist and Upholder of religions” (*The 20th Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, 2017*). Additionally, the enduring friendship between Chinese and Thai Buddhists and their long history of exchange (Hujiang, n.d., p. 2) highlights the importance of understanding the role of China's Buddhist narratives in furthering diplomacy, particularly in relation to its BRI projects. While only a few studies have focused on the case of China and Thailand, it is clear that Buddhism plays a crucial role in shaping their relations and should not be overlooked.

4. Research field and previous research in the area

Chinese Buddhism

Several studies have investigated Buddhism in China. Ji's (2012) study on Chinese Buddhism as a social force on the relationship between the Chinese state, religion and society shows that the social influence of Buddhism, especially Han Buddhism, is gaining more important and attention (Ji, 2012, p. 8,17). Extensive research has shown the religion accepts Chinese authority in helping the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to translate political orders into Buddhist terms (Ji, 2012, p. 19) which became the "characteristic of Chinese Buddhism" (W.-Y. Cheng, 2020, p. 10). Cheng's (2020) study proposes that there is a common understanding that Chinese Buddhism is dominated by Han Chinese, the largest ethnicity in China and overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, Thailand included.

However, in the literature on Chinese Buddhism, the relative importance of Theravada Buddhism is debated. Cheng's (2020, p. 10) study highlights how Theravada Buddhism, practiced in southern China, is often excluded from the term 'Chinese Buddhism'. Panyagaew (2010, pp. 43-44) studied the development of the transnational Theravada Buddhism in southern China (Yunnan Province) and Tai peoples in the upper Mekong region countries, namely, Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar. This is particularly relevant to this thesis when looking at the diplomatic and cross-border relations in the region. For example, as Panyagaew (2010) has shown, revivalism of Theravada Buddhism in Xishuangbanna in 1982 was successfully done in collaboration with Thailand through a formal agreement to bring the practices and new knowledge of Thai Theravada Buddhism and Thai culture to Buddhist spaces in southwest China.

Drawing on the work of Cheng (2020) and Panyagaew (2010), when discussing 'Chinese Buddhism', this thesis includes Theravada Buddhism, as practiced in southwest China and its neighbouring countries bordering Yunnan province, as well as forms of Buddhism practiced by the Han Chinese majority. Focusing on Buddhism as locally understood and practiced in China's Southeast Asian borderlands, as well as national conceptions of Chinese Buddhism allow us to study Chinese Buddhism as a political tool and a new strategy in China's foreign affairs, through both geo-cultural politics and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Soft power and public diplomacy

The concept of soft power in the field of international relations was first proposed and defined by Joseph Nye (1990), who argued that power³ accrues when one country gets other countries to follow the its culture, ideas and policies (p. 153). Thereby, soft power aims to “attract and co-opt”, and soft power has the “ability to obtain preferred outcomes through attraction” (Nye, 2008, p. 94) by employing different resources, not only the country’s soft power tools, including culture, values, and policies, but can also be obtained through the “passive use of military and economic resources” (Nye, 1990, pp. 161–162).

According to Xu (2015), China needs to improve its international religious image, which is very important for China’s soft power and “China’s international participation is no longer confined to the field of politics and economics, but increasingly involved in culture and religion” (p. 27). Another study from Ma (2010) presented the examination of China’s cultural and public diplomacy at both theoretical and practical levels and suggested that the Chinese government and its people should engage in cultural and public diplomacy concurrently, promoting harmonious and peaceful coexistence among countries (Ma, 2010, p. 36). In addition, he proposed that the principles of peaceful coexistence and finding “common ground while accepting differences” (Ma, 2010, p. 39) serve as the foundation for the discourse of China’s cultural and public diplomacy. He further emphasizes the importance of the state in working on cultural and public communication as well as collaboration at different levels, methods, and various areas (Ma, 2010, p. 39).

In addition, Lo and Pan (2016) studies demonstrates that China’s soft power extends beyond just the cultural aspect. In fact, economic, diplomatic, and political measures have been used in combination to bolster its soft power as part of the country’s national development strategy (Lo & Pan, 2016, p. 515). This has helped to allay concerns of the so-called “China threat”(Cho & Jeong, 2008, p. 460), particularly with respect to initiatives related to Confucianism and other international projects at the global level (Lo & Pan, 2016, p. 515).

Recently, Yeo and Gloria (2023, p. 35) have examined the limitation of Chinese public diplomacy, in the case of the Philippines, that fails to increase Filipinos’ positive perception towards China despite the pro-China government of President Rodrigo Duterte. Yeo and

³ For the different types in the exercise of power, see more on Joseph Nye (2009).

Gloria (2023) suggest that “constructivist approaches in international relations can be used to demonstrate how national identity plays a crucial role in mediating the impact of Chinese influence” (p. 36). Identifying the “target audience” such as public officials, opinion leaders, the media as well as specific groups like the diaspora, is thus crucial in promoting a positive image, better understanding of national policies and countering negative perceptions (Yeo & Gloria, 2023, p. 37). Thereby, applying the identification of target audience is very important to the study of soft power and public diplomacy as well as in the communicative process in this study.

Religion and the use of Buddhism as public diplomacy

Xu (2015) reveals that the main framework of China’s religious public diplomacy consists of the government, academia, and religious groups working together to communicate with target audiences, enhance the national religious image as well as to increase China’s soft power and international voice (pp. 14–15). Xu concludes that religion serves not only “a platform for China’s public diplomacy” but also shows “the international community the spiritual outlook of the Chinese people and provide profound spiritual basis and resources for a harmonious world and the policy of good neighbourliness and friendship” (2015, p. 20).

Buddhist public diplomacy can be viewed as the effort of the Beijing government to counterbalance the international popularity of the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism, the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, and to utilise Buddhism as “religious theories that go with socialist core values” (Ramachandran, 2019, pp. 17–18). Woods (2022) says that Buddhism is a form of soft power and describes it “as one of the China Communist Party’s magic weapons in expanding the spread and reach of Chinses influence” (p. 12). Ji's (2012) study on Buddhism sees it as an element of that state's soft power since the 1950s as the Chinese government has employed Buddhism in diplomatic affairs, and it has been seen as more valuable and realistic because of " its transethnic and international influence in Asia” (p. 21), especially Buddhist countries in Asia. Thereby, Chinese Buddhism is a cultural resource for the Chinese government⁴ and has been often mentioned in official statement as “a means of promoting the soft power of China in world politics” (Ji, 2012, p. 22).

⁴ See more on Buddhism after Mao: negotiations, continuities, and reinventions by Ji et al. (2019)

At the same time, Cheng's (2020) work on transnational Buddhism interestingly points out that "transnational Buddhism is not a one-way passage" (pp. 11–12) shaped by local contexts in each country but by the influence of economic and political factors. Xu (2015) shares the same idea with Cheng (2020) that "religion's impact depends on certain material conditions. Without infrastructure, logistical and hardware support, religious soft power is impossible" (Xu, 2015, p. 24).

Lastly, Raymond sees that religious diplomacy is an increasing influence operation under the government of President Xi Jinping. Such operation is primarily conducted by United Front Work Department (UFWD) (Raymond, 2020, p. 350). As the author sees that Buddhism not only contributes to China's foreign policy but works along with China's economic and political purpose, the idea is supported by Xu (2015) that "China's current foreign policy goals, particularly in the BRI, they do not only have economic and political dimensions but contain the cultural and religious contents as well." (p. 30)

However, there is a limitation to China's Buddhist Diplomacy. As Ramachandran (2019) writes: "Buddhism cannot make the PRC seem a friendly neighbour when it continues to act unilaterally to bolster its position in territorial and other disputes. Thus its use of hard power is undermining its soft power diplomacy" (p. 20).

Buddhism diplomacy under the BRI

"Religion has become a strategic entry point through which China's soft power can be wielded, with reference to a common destiny, being intended to soften the image and dampen disquiet surrounding the BRI whilst recasting the Buddhist and Confucian worlds as a part of a multi-civilization regional order" (Raymond, 2020, p. 346, 351).

Buddhism is utilised as a means to advance "shared goals" (Raymond, 2020, p. 361). Woods (2022) focused on using Buddhism as a cultural resource for the Chinese government to work with Southeast Asian leaders and communities in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Thailand (p. 3). Since the implementation of the BRI in 2013, Chinese infrastructure investment in the region has been welcomed by those countries due to the power structures of the political authoritarianism legacies (Woods, 2022, pp. 6–7). Thereby, China's geo-cultural power under BRI is being mobilized, especially the term of soft power and cultural diplomacy

that “exists alongside the ‘harder’ infrastructure projects that define BRI” (Woods, 2022, p. 7, 12).

There are essential key strategies on Buddhist diplomacy used by China in mainland Southeast Asian countries, for instance, establishing bilateral friendship associations, providing funds to restore temples, setting up Buddhist broadcasting networks, and investing in Buddhist-themed BRI infrastructure to appeal to populations in these countries (Ashiwa & Wank, 2020, p. 5). Buddhism contributes to the economic-political rise of China, which is in line with the work of Raymond (2020) on the increasing presence of China’s Buddhist Diplomacy targeted at Southeast Asia and linked to its BRI. His findings show that “a perception of shared Buddhism could even lead to a notion of “friendship”, a special kind of self-other encounter in international relations and emphasizing China’s Buddhist identity might help mainland Southeast Asian regimes to reduce opposition to unpopular “BRI Chinese-related projects” (Raymond, 2020, p. 358). Huijiang (n.d.) pointed out similar ideas: “Buddhism plays a special part in communicating what is inside the human mind, and it encourages the promotion of social harmony and our common development” (p. 4).

The Chinese government used Buddhist resources, including “hardware such as temples, sutras, śāṛīra, artwork, statues, and software such as well-respected Buddhist masters” (Islam, 2019, p. 85). These mechanisms help create a softer image for China and gain access to senior and influential members of the Sangha and policy advisers to decision-makers at the national level (Ramachandran, 2019, p. 16). In turn, these Buddhism-oriented mechanisms provide “an opportunity for China to promote people-to-people interactions in exchange for support from these BRI countries” (Chung, 2022, pp. 6–7) and “to project a harmonious, accepting image as the country seeks to increase its influence with its religious neighbours” (Huijiang, n.d., p. 3; Scott, 2016, p. 146).

Raymond’s (2020) study on the use of Buddhism as a cultural resource in China’s diplomacy and “an adjunct to the BRI in/towards mainland Southeast Asia shows that China has been working to build “influence at the ideational level” approaching the subregion (pp. 346–347). His findings show that religion can help to “constitute a system of shared perceptions, promote political views consistent with the policies of the CCP, and seek to win the support of key constituencies” in target countries (Raymond, 2020, pp. 350–351). Hence, China’s Buddhist diplomacy requires effective communication and strategic narratives between the government of China and the target country (Xu, 2015, p. 28).

Communication and strategic narratives

Cheng suggests that the advancement of communicative technology nowadays contributes to the rapid pace of globalization, which “makes it very difficult to speak of a religion in isolation or bounded within national borders” (W.-Y. Cheng, 2020, p. 6). Noort’s (2020) work explains that “political actors communicate strategic narratives to shape the meaning of place-image in the past, present and future” (van Noort, 2020, pp. 185–186). Hence, history is selectively used by the actor, the Chinese state, aiming to increase positive perception. Under BRI, China uses historical narratives to reimagine “a peaceful China and an integrated and connected regional- and world order” (van Noort, 2020, p. 187) by translating the historical ideas and discourses on identity and a desirable international order through modern strategic communication.⁵ Social constructivism used in strategic communication is further studied by Sciorati (2023) on China’s engagement with Central Asian countries from the lenses of heritage diplomacy. She used a qualitative discourse analysis of media texts on discursive construction and her finding revealed that China emphasize on “the shared past among states and heritage positively engages with the core national interests of recipient countries” (Sciorati, 2023, pp. 94–95, 98).

For China and its Buddhist Diplomacy towards Thailand, earlier research has focused on the role of Buddhism in the “construction of the common community of human destiny” (Raymond, 2020, p. 355). China’s BRI-linked Buddhist diplomacy with Thailand began in 2015 with the visit to Thailand of the Secretary of the Communist Party in Hainan, Luo Baoming. It promoted the cooperation on Buddhism between China and Southeast Asia under the OBOR (Raymond, 2020, p. 357). At the same time, the perception of Thai people and Chinese narratives have been studied by Bukh (2023) through the observation of language used in newspapers, texts books, writings, and speeches by politicians and political commentators to examine the elites’ discourse on Thailand’s relation with China (p. 680). Her study concluded that “Thai public perceptions are rather scare, but those that exist... This have generally maintained a favourable view of China and see it as a positive external influence to Thailand” (Bukh, 2022, p. 692). However, dissatisfaction by Thais has been observed with views against the Thai government’s close relations with China and the Chinese model of authoritarian governance (Tejapira, 2020, pp. 21–22) as previously presented in the background chapter of this thesis.

⁵ For a type of power construction, see more on Carolijn van Noort (2020)

Relevant case study to the thesis

Tabita Rosendal's (2022) pioneering study focusing on the strategic narrative of China's Buddhist Diplomacy in Sri Lanka by analysing Sri Lankan and Chinese official state documents, statements from Buddhist organizations and news articles are highly relevant to this thesis in topic, scope, and methodology. Her research applied the concept of strategic narratives. She found that China's strategic narrative has been somewhat successful but she mentioned that "while China's projection of Buddhist strategic narratives, in tandem with infrastructure investments, may ensure the BRI's continued implementation, this depends on the willingness of host countries of accepting these narratives" (Rosendal, 2022, p. 1).

Rosendal (2022) highlights "the importance of new media ecology and the effects of changing communications environment in shaping the policies and strategic narratives of states" (p. 5). Furthermore, she proposes that China primarily uses identity narratives under the set of interrelated strategic narratives, projected through Buddhist diplomacy and the interlink that Buddhist diplomacy works with economic investment in Sri Lanka to enhance China's legitimacy and power (Rosendal, 2022, p. 16, 18).

Identifying the research gap

As Bhattacharya (2018) emphasized, there is a "need to shift focus from the China threat phobia to the transnational influence of Buddhism" (p. 2) as a strategic tool in geo-cultural politics. While a few studies have been conducted on China's Buddhist Diplomacy in Southeast Asia, there have not been many studies on strategic narratives in China's Buddhist Diplomacy towards Thailand. The author is responding to Bhattacharya's (2018) call and contends that a study of formulating strategic narratives and communication should focus on language, which will be discussed further in this thesis' methodology. The concept of strategic narratives will be further discussed in the theoretical framework section of this thesis.

5. Theoretical framework

This thesis aims to use the concept of strategic narratives “as an alternative to that of soft power” (Roselle et al., 2014) and as an analytical framework. According to Nye (2004), soft power is an attractive power used to affect the behaviour of other states by creating images for others to perceive; it is indeed a “representational force” in global politics (Nye, 2004, pp. 1–6), which in the case of China is explicit in the state-crafted Buddhist diplomacy. Soft power as viewed by the East Asian countries as “a form of national power that is based on ideational and cultural attractiveness, which is internationally or unintentionally realized by actors in international relations to achieve strategic imperatives” (S.-W. Lee, 2011, p. 11). Countries employ soft power through their public diplomacies as a tool of strategic communication which aims “to communication with other countries and attract their public sectors, rather than merely their governments” (Nye, 2008, p. 95).

However, Roselle et al. (2014) points out that soft power “has become a catch-all term that has lost explanatory power, just as hard power once did” (p. 70) and argues that “the concept of strategic narrative gives us intellectual purchase on the complexities of international politics today” (Roselle et al., 2014, p. 70). Strategic narratives are the idea of “narrative integration” into a “broader theoretical argument about structure, agency and the construction of order in the international system” (Miskimmon et al., 2014, p. 1). Strategic narratives serve as a “means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics and a tool to extend their influence, shape behaviour and manage expectations of other domestic and international actors”(Miskimmon et al., 2014, p. 3). The importance of strategic narrative can be said in two ways: “first in the behavioural way of A getting B to do what B would not otherwise do, and second, in the constituting way of forming an identity and meaning to the system” (X. Zhang, 2015, p. 218).

Political actors strategically use narratives to “construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics to shape the behaviour of domestic and international actors” (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p. 2). Hence, these political actors have many identities and are contextual (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p. 5). The author sees China as a political actor in utilising the narratives of Buddhism in different countries, such as Sri Lanka in Rosendal’s (2022) work and Thailand in this study.

Then, how should we view these strategic narratives? We first must understand that narrative represents “frameworks that allows humans to connect apparently unconnected

phenomena around some casual transformation” (Miskimmon et al., 2014, p. 7). The connecting process starts from assigning a single meaning to actors, plot, time, and space as important elements of the narrative structure (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p. 5). First, the actors, they are placed at the centre of the structure which represents “those who have agency and are depicted as important to the shaping of narrative meaning” (Miskimmon et al., 2014, p. 75). Actors are divided into state actors and non-state actors given specific, objectives, behaviours, and features and involved with the identity construction process. Studying narratives helps us to understand how the actors are defined and characterized and how they use narratives to “influence individuals and groups of people that exist within foreign policy process, including political leaders, interest groups, bureaucratic actors, diplomats, journalists, and the public” (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p. 35). In this thesis, we will look at the Chinese and Thai governments, and related institutions, as actors and units of analysis.

The second element in narrative construction consists of events, time, and plot. The first two are closely relevant to the temporal dimension of strategic narratives that aims to address the past, the present and the future (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p. 109). Additionally, it reveals how the actor received or perceived potential threats and how they will cope with them. Plot is important as it serves to “present the needed action to resolve a disruption to the status quo” (Miskimmon et al., 2014, p. 76) and to determine the limits of the possible conflict resolutions.

Third, setting and space, the first refers to how the international system is portrayed and functions (Miskimmon et al., 2014, p. 76). Therefore, it is very important to place actors in a particular setting because these two components are interdependent as one is directly influencing and affecting the other. The setting which the actor’s actions take place “does not represent a neutral space” (Miskimmon et al., 2014, p. 76). China’s narrative on the peaceful rise is challenging the status of great global power and the impact is predicted to be a new global order based on a multipower distribution of power.

This thesis employs the typology of strategic narratives put forward by Miskimmon et al. (2017): system narratives, identity narratives, and issue narratives (p.8). Firstly, system narratives describe “how the world is structured, who the players are, and how the system works and change over time” (Miskimmon et al., 2017, p. 8) and designates actors in specific roles integrated into the world system.

Secondly, identity narratives focus on “identities of actors in international affairs that are in a process of constant negotiation and contestation”(Miskimmon et al., 2013, p. 7). This narrative “sets out what the story of the state or nation is” and “what are the key interests, principle and value” (Miskimmon et al., 2014, p. 76) which guide to the state’s actions and behaviours. Ning Liao explained that Chinese political leaders use narratives related to history to shape understandings of Chinese values and China’s role in the international system” (cited in Miskimmon et al., 2017, p. 8).

Finally, issue narratives “set the government actions in a context, with an explanation of who the important actors are, what the conflict or issue is, and how a particular course of action will resolve the underlying issue” (Miskimmon et al., 2014, p. 76) as well as explain the need for specific policies and positive impact (X. Zhang, 2015, p. 218).

This study closely examines the communicative process which is the essential component of the strategic narratives for China and Thailand on Buddhist diplomacy. The process includes narrative formation, projection, and reception (Miskimmon et al., 2017, p. 4). The formation of the narrative in this study is linked to the actors which have been designated by Chinese government as senders. According to the framing concept of Robert Enman, it is the act of “selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution” (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p. 7). Actors use framing concepts and form strategic narratives to shape public opinion with short and/or long time goals (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p. 7). The formation requires understanding the strategic goal of political actors and “types of communication namely, persuasion, argument and representational force” (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p. 8).

The projection is the narrative dissemination to the targeted audience through use of different communication channels such as media, speeches, and public events (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p. 8) and the advancement of communication technologies has affected the new media environment and sovereignty as “new media giants,...new geopolitics, all conspire in remapping the information space” (Miskimmon et al., 2013, pp. 10–11). This thesis tries to grasp strategic narratives on Buddhism as a statecraft policy used by both governments at all levels to see their projection of “narratives about states and their characters, with a set of complex and intersecting mechanism” (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p. 128).

Last in the process is reception, which focuses on how audiences “receive and interpret narratives, considering how narrative structures enable or constrain interpretation, and how audiences use their existing beliefs and values to make sense of strategic narratives” (Miskimmon et al., 2017, p. 16). This thesis will look at the effect or impact on the Thai State through the analysis of “their attitudes, opinions and behaviour” (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p. 12).

6. Methods and empirical materials

Research methodology

The first subsection outlines the primary research question and related sub-questions. In the second subsection, the ontological and epistemological stance of the research problem is reflected upon. The third subsection presents the research design for the study, while the fourth subsection describes the data collection and analysis methods utilised. The fifth and final subsection addresses any methodological challenges encountered during the research process and discusses ethical considerations.

Research question and sub-questions

This study aims to answer the main research question: *how has the Chinese government utilised Buddhism to support the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Thailand?*

Research sub-questions on the formation, projection, and reception of Buddhist strategic narratives in relation to the BRI are as follows:

How are narratives on Buddhist public diplomacy formed?

How are narratives on Buddhism projected and contested?

Reflections on ontological and epistemological positioning of the research problem

Most of the population in Thailand are Buddhist, practicing a similar Buddhism to Chinese living in Yunnan Province in Xishuangbanna due to historical and geographical factors. Hence, Buddhism is a cultural resource to build influence and a sense of shared values between the two neighbouring countries (Raymond, 2020, pp. 346–348). On the 15th of May 2019, Master Yan Jue, Vice-president of the Buddhist Association of China (BAC), led a Chinese Buddhist delegation to Bangkok, Thailand, for the Vesak celebrations⁶ and to engage with the Thai Buddhist community. The visit was seen as a new era in Buddhist exchange between Thailand and China. Master Yan Jue said that the Thai government and the Buddhist Community placed importance on Buddhist exchange and the visit from Chinese delegation (Yin, 2019). The Panchen Erdeni Choskyi Gyalpo said, “the Chinese and Thai governments

⁶ Vesak day is considered by Buddhists worldwide as the most sacred day which falls on the full moon day in May. It is the day to commemorate significant events related to the Buddha who was born in 623 B.C., attained enlightenment, and passed away. The United Nations General Assembly acknowledged the importance of Vesak day through resolution 54/115 of 1999. available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/278/81/PDF/N0027881.pdf?OpenElement> [accessed 24 April 2023]

actively cooperate, and the people's minds are interlinked.... Buddhism plays an important bond in cultural exchanges... and has contributed to consolidating peace between them" (Yin, 2019). Hujiang (n.d.) pointed out similar ideas: "Buddhism plays a special part in communicating what is inside the human mind, and it encourages the promotion of social harmony and our common development" (p. 4). The above example suggests that Chinese Buddhist diplomacy is a process of narrative construction, through the language published on websites and spoken by actors, by emphasizing the shared value and religion as well as long-standing of close relations between people of the two countries.

The author sees that the role of China's Buddhist diplomacy and the construction of its strategic narrative need further attention. This thesis focuses on language as the focal point in narrative construction and qualitative research. Language is considered the bearer of "meaning, context, and power" and treated "as significantly more than a medium through which social research is conducted, and it becomes a focus of attention in its own right" (Bryman, 2016, p. 526). Language can shape the individual's perceived reality and affect international affairs. Recognizing that language is key to the construction of strategic narratives and their interpretation of their meanings by target audiences, the ontological and epistemological stances of the thesis are grounded in constructivism and interpretivism.

The ontological perspective is referred to as "how the nature of reality is understood" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 54). A constructivist approach sees that social phenomena, including state behaviour and their meanings, are "continually being accomplished by social actors and not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision" (Bryman, 2016, p. 29). Strategic narratives in this study require "identification and scrutinization of the actors in international relations" (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p. 30). Actors use their agentic capacities in projecting their narrative as "the common-sense understanding of the past, present, and the future of international relations" (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p. 109). The thesis rejects objectivism as a suitable ontology, as constructivism is more compatible with the approach to knowledge production of this research. Language is an essential tool for interaction and convey narratives, and it plays a significant role in constructing meaning through interaction (Bryman, 2016, p. 34). Language is utilised to produce, achieve, and searches well as to be recorded, used and manipulated to make the stuff in international relations meaningful (Miskimmon et al., 2013, p. 22). Ontological positioning, to understand the world as social products, is linked to the choice of method, discourse analysis, which will be later discussed in the research design subsection.

The epistemological perspective understands what constitutes knowledge or what should be regarded as knowledge. This thesis takes interpretivism as a framework that “respects the differences between people and the objects of the natural sciences and therefore requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action” (Bryman, 2016, p. 26). In the epistemological position, interpretivism enables us to “understand the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants” (Bryman, 2016, p. 375). In international relations language, as Miskimmon et al. (2013) write: “Narratives are received and interpreted by audiences in the context of their experience of that country and its foreign policies, historically, today, and in the foreseeable future” (p. 169).

In conclusion, interpretivism is a suitable choice and epistemological reasoning that constitutes how data will be approached, and it “denies that there is an external reality awaiting a definitive portrayal by the researcher and it, therefore, disavows the notion that any researcher can arrive at a privileged account of the aspect of the social world being investigated” (Bryman, 2016, p. 531).

Research design

According to Miskimmon et al. (2013), the communication strategies used by many countries in their public diplomacies are different depending on the event, process, and target involved (p. 170). This thesis is looking at the two-way communication between China and Thailand from the year 2013 to the year 2022, requiring in-depth analysis of data and allocation of shared patterns of data due to the large amount of collected data. Consequently, a thematic analysis has been selected and is described below.

Thematic Analysis (TA) is “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79) and it “involves the searching across a data set - be that a number of interviews or focus groups, or a range of texts - to find repeated patterns of meaning” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). Furthermore, TA not only helps us to identify required elements that need to come together for successful qualitative analysis with integrity (Brown & Hewison, 2005, p. 425) but to consider how these components connect and build on each other (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 4). Hence, TA is suitable for this study because it helps in identifying and examining narratives, themes and trends within strategic narratives as well as providing valuable understanding into the objectives, principles, or interests of the actors who are projecting narratives.

There are three broad approaches of TA, namely, coding, reliability, codebook and reflexive (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 6). Despite that, this study only uses **Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA)** approach in order to present the analysis as a set of themes or narratives that represent forms of shared meaning. Ayre & McCaffery (2022) suggest that “RTA recognises the inherent role of the researcher in constructing themes as they engage with the data. Although this RTA approach is slower and more involved, it takes full advantage of the richness of qualitative data” (p. 78).

Methods of data collection and analysis

The study employed a qualitative research design that involved published newspapers, reports, articles, and speeches. To answer the thesis questions, the data were carefully analysed using reflexive thematic analysis to interpret the data and identify key themes and patterns in the narratives of the relevant actors in strategic narratives.

Data Collection

The author found that documents provide “a potential strategy” for the narrative analysis of this thesis (Bryman, 2016, p. 590). For this reason, **primary source of data** are documents collected from the official Chinese government texts, such as statements from the BAC, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, the China Cultural Centre in Bangkok, the Embassy of the PRC in Thailand, and official government and news articles from Thailand, including National Office of Buddhism, the Royal Thai Embassy in the PRC, and Official Government News. **Supplementary data sources** included news from the official state news agency of the PRC, i.e., Xinhua News Agency, China Central Television (CCTV), and China Radio International (CRI). These documents including newspaper articles, press releases, public announcement, and speeches, offer valuable insights into bilateral events, cooperative efforts, and initiatives between Thailand and China. Moreover, they provide a comprehensive understanding of Chinese public diplomacy and the utilisation of Buddhist diplomacy, allowing for an examination of the narratives employed by both Chinese and Thai stakeholders based on the data at hand.

Initially, the author used text query to find suitable articles, news and documents that are significantly relevant to the issue (Bryman, 2016, p. 612) containing phrases emerged from the research questions and literature review chapter, such as, “Thailand”, “Belt and Road Initiative”, “Buddhist Association of China”, “Southeast Asia” and “Lancang-Mekong countries”.

The author decided to collect documents published between 2013 and 2022 because the year 2013 was the inception of the BRI and the length of the data collection will allow us to gain insights into the evolving nature of Buddhist diplomacy between China and Thailand. A total of 103⁷ relevant publications were collected, of which 96 were written in Chinese but translated into English, 2 in English, and 5 in Thai.

Data Analysis

Operationalizing variable sets of data is “the most important doorway into the analysis” (Luker, 2008, p. 124). The data analysis process involved critical reading of the material, coding, and analysing the state narrative – based on both inductive and deductive coding (Bryman, 2016, p. 606). The emerging themes and subthemes were discussed and discussed through the framework of three levels of organization of strategic narratives because these narratives are “central to the identity and behaviour of actors in the international system, the structure of the system itself, and how ideas, issues, and policies are contested” (Miskimmon et al., 2014, p. 249). Moreover, the typology of strategic narratives and the communicative process are used in the analysis part of this study.

For inductive thematic analysis, as put forward by Braun and Clark (2006), there are six phases. The first phase, “familiarizing yourself with the data”, requires the researcher to read and re-read the data collected from the websites, and take note of the initial ideas. The second phase, “generating initial codes”, is where the codes are created, and the researcher systematically pays attention to each content, texts, or quotes. “Searching for themes” comes at the third phase, where the analysis begins, and the codes are collated into potential themes. The fourth phase is called “reviewing themes”. This stage is to refine the themes and ensure that they work in relation to the codes and the data set as a whole. The fifth phase is to “define and name themes.” Finally, the sixth phase is “report production”, which involves telling the story of the data and providing evidence of the themes using explanations and examples (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87).

Then, these publications were coded to reveal the most important narratives that constitute strategic narratives. As a result, the initial primary categories were “Core value of socialism”, “Sino-ization of Buddhism”, “Belt and Road Initiative”, “Southern Buddhism”, “Theravada Buddhism”, and “Education and Exchange” while the secondary codes emerged later in the actual coding process.

⁷ See more in Appendix.

The last process is the data analysis with the assistance of a computer-supported techniques program called “NVivo” as the most suitable method for data interpretation. The program is “capable of bringing out aspects of the set of findings, and, through the employment of a more fine-grained analysis, allowing a greater sensitivity to the nature and content of specific themes”(Bryman, 2016, p. 553).

7. Ethical considerations

This subsection presents the awareness of shortcomings of this study, ethical challenges and solutions, and the author's reflexivity as part of the knowledge production, as shown in the following categories.

Limitations

The research approach has some limitations, especially the author's language proficiency in Chinese. Working in translation is a limitation of this research resulting in a more limited range of information accessibility and the risks involved in translations distorting what has been written or said in the original version of documents. Nevertheless, translated documents provide accessibility to the author. In addition, the writer, as a Buddhist, is able to provide a more comprehensive and accurate translation of documents and articles related to Buddhism, including the titles of Thai Buddhist monks, Buddhist organizations in Thailand, and Buddhist teachings, thereby reducing the risk of mistranslation.

Also, the accessibility of documents can be a limitation, as some key documents are not available to the public. However, what is published and presented in public by relevant government institutions and their willingness to make certain documents accessible and limiting access to others is part of shaping the strategic narrative. As this thesis studies and analyses the state's strategic narratives, the government's presentation is treated as part of the carefully crafted strategic narrative of the state.

Ethical considerations

The author sees that translated texts could lead to the ethical issue of misinterpretation. However, the state has approved to publicise the study materials. Hence, this information can still be treated as the state's narrative. According to Bryman (2016), ethical principles, such as invasion of privacy, harm to participants, lack of informed consent, or deception, are non-essential because primary data is not included in this research (See more in Bryman, 2016, pp. 125–133).

Reflexivity

Given that this study is epistemologically constructivist, the role of the author is crucial in interpreting the reality that the Chinese state creates through its narrative. Reflexivity helps the author as a researcher understand how personal views, positionality, and personality may have affected or created a bias in this study. In addition, as a Thai citizen

conducting this research, it allows the author a greater understanding of which institutions were relevant and how to access documents.

Moreover, the author also employed a reflexive approach to fieldwork-based research in Thailand, from January to March 2023, where the author visited temples and Buddhist educational institutions as well as attended special lectures from Thammasat University. However, it is worth mentioning that the author faced difficulties in accessing hard-copy data documents and working documents from relevant government institutions. As a result, the data collection method was limited to only online-based data collection.

8. Data presentation, analysis, and discussion

This section is organized based on a theoretical framework that consists of two main parts. The first part examines the communicative process and encompasses various aspects such as formation, projection, and contestation (Miskimmon et al., 2017, p. 4). The second part delves into the different levels of narrative formation, namely system narratives, identity narratives, and issue narratives (Miskimmon et al., 2017, p. 8). The subsequent analysis and discussion are then conducted in conjunction with the findings.

Communicative process

Formation

Studying communicative process and applying strategic narratives allows the author to track and see the development of China's strategic narratives over the time span (2013-2022), beginning with formation. Roselle and her colleagues (2014) propose that a close examination of political actors' strategic narratives necessitates the use of process textual analysis. Such an approach can facilitate the comprehension of the domestic political factors that shape policy narratives, as well as the manner in which national and international narratives limit the perceptions of political actors regarding the potential courses of action available to them (p. 78). By closely examining the documents, it becomes evident that several Chinese actors play primary roles, including the Communist Party of China (CCP), the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the State Administration of Religious Affairs, the UWFD, the Buddhist Association of China, and educational institutions such as Peking University and Fudan University. The presented data on the formation of the communicative process demonstrates that the Chinese actors align with Ma's (2010) observations, suggesting that the Chinese state employs diverse strategies at multiple levels, involving the government, academia, and religious groups, and operates across various domains to achieve their objectives.

The Chinese government uses the BAC as a key organization to counter any potential challenges to its authority while ensuring Buddhism is controlled by the state. The BAC serves a leading and guiding role and in promoting the inheritance of China's traditional culture and cultural exchanges with foreign countries. As pointed out by Ji (2012) in the literature review section, the functional role of the BAC has been strengthened by enhancing its influence and cohesion through the amendment of its constitution in accordance with the

regulations on religious affairs and the registration and administration of social organizations (Shuren, 2015).

In this thesis, the data suggests that the BAC is of significant importance in Buddhist diplomacy. Besides, in the view of the author, it is important to note that the Communist Party exercises strict control over the BAC. By examining the documents, one can infer that the BAC serves as the leader of the four disciples of Buddhism in the three language schools across the country, namely Han, Tibetan and Pali. Additionally, the BAC works with the people of the entire country to study and implement the spirit of the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, while maintaining a close alliance with the Party Central Committee (Buddhist Association of China, 2013).

In addition to identifying actors, the document analysis allows us to see how the Chinese government has put efforts into strengthening the training of government information officers and the level of religious government information disclosure. The use of new technological information such as an official website and WeChat official account to disseminate Buddhism information in a timely manner, promote international friendly exchanges and the new image of Chinese Buddhism, and “timely report major activities, key work and national Buddhist trends through real-time news and special topics. It has become an online new media platform to promote Buddhist culture and advocate righteousness and righteousness, affecting all over the world” (Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, 2016).

In summary, the communicative process of strategic narratives, analyzed in this study, highlights the involvement of various Chinese actors and institutions, particularly the BAC, in shaping and disseminating narratives related to Buddhist diplomacy. These narratives reflect the Chinese government's control, promotion of cultural heritage, international engagement, and technological advancements in the realm of Buddhism.

Projection

Textual analysis provides insights into the contestation and processes that are associated with the projection of narratives in a given context (Roselle et al., 2014, pp. 78–79). A group of narratives have emerged from the data, which can be exemplified by the following typologies: mutual trust, friendship, and historical and cultural ties.

The first narrative in the projection highlights the significance of strengthening mutual trust between China and Thailand through high-level exchanges. This emphasizes the

crucial role of leaders in both countries (China Radio International, 2017) as expressed in statements of Master Shi Yinshun, Vice President of the BAC, said during his visit to Thailand that “he was very moved by the friendly reception of the Thai political and Buddhist circles. He hoped that the Buddhist circles of China and Thailand would strengthen exchanges and make greater contributions to the friendly exchanges between China and Thailand” (Buddhist Association of China, 2013d).

The second narrative is the long standing historical and cultural ties between China and Thailand which have been deeply influenced by Buddhism. This discursive construction analysis is aligned with the study of Sciorati (2023) that “the shared past among the states and heritage positively engage with the core national interests of recipient countries” (pp. 94–95, 98). An example of this narrative is evident in the statement “Zhongtai⁸ is connected by mountains and rivers and is a good neighbour and a good partner...Buddhism is profound and has a long history. We have maintained close and friendly exchanges for a long time” (Chen, 2013).

The third narrative draws on Raymond’s (2020) idea that a perception of shared Buddhism can potentially build a notion of “friendship”. This is particularly salient in the context of Buddhism, where certain practices and beliefs are shared across different regions and cultures. One example of such efforts to foster friendship among Buddhists is the designation of the Wesak Festival as the Buddha's auspicious day by the Chinese Buddhist community (Buddhist Association of China, 2013c).

These narratives, identified in the document analysis, contribute to understanding the communicative processes involved in projecting strategic narratives in the context of China-Thailand relations. Further discussion can explore the implications and effects of these narratives on bilateral relations, public perception, and cultural exchange between the two countries.

Contestation

While soft power analysis aims to assess the level of attractiveness and appeal of a country to an audience, examining the narratives that shape public perception of international

⁸ The term "Zhongtai" is derived from two Chinese words, "Zhongguo" (中国), which means China, and "Taiguo" (泰国), which means Thailand. This abbreviation refers to the close relationship between China and Thailand.

relations provides a more thorough analysis. By analysing how audiences understand and interpret a set of strategic narrative elements, researchers can gain valuable insight into the ways in which they perceive international affairs (Roselle et al., 2014, p. 79).

First, the utilisation of Buddhism as a means of conveying narratives in Chinese Buddhist diplomacy is evident from the Thai State's recognition of its role in fostering bilateral relations between the two nations. Both sides have expressed a mutual desire to promote the exchange of Buddhist culture, language, and education, indicating Buddhism's potential as a facilitator of cross-cultural communication and understanding. General Surasit Thanadtang, the Director of the Thai-Chinese Strategic Research Centre, explained that the interpretation or meaning of certain concepts may differ between Chinese and Western contexts. For instance, the strategic concept of "win-win," which aims to create mutually beneficial outcomes, may be different from the European approach that typically prioritizes one side winning over the other. Likewise, in China, the concept of "One Belt, One Road" refers to collective victory instead of one side winning and the other losing (Arun-ek, 2018). This underscores the need for cultural sensitivity and understanding in communication efforts.

Second, the analysis of the data suggests the logic and consistency of the narrative of the Chinese Buddhist diplomacy narratives as perceived by the Thai State. The narrative consistently emphasizes the strengthening of cultural and educational ties between China and Thailand, particularly in the field of Buddhism. References to events like the "World Buddhist Forum" organized by the BAC with the strong support and active participation of Thailand (Wang, 2013) further reinforce the consistency of the narratives.

Third, the construction of the BRI has facilitated increased exchanges between Chinese and Thai nationals, providing valuable opportunities for cultural interactions and exchanges. The resulting influx of Chinese visitors to Thailand and vice versa, has contributed to the promotion of cultural understanding and cooperation (China Radio International, 2017).

The intended recipients of Chinese Buddhist diplomacy narratives comprise a range of state and non-state actors from Thailand, including: influential members of the Sangha Supreme Council of Thailand and the Thai royal family and the policy advisors who hold decision-making roles at the national level such as the National Office of Buddhism, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Culture and Educational institutions (China Radio International, 2017). Notable engagement between Buddhist leaders, such as Master Xuecheng, President of the BAC, and prominent figures within the Thai Sangha, exemplifies the strategic

targeting of influential individuals for dialogue and relationship-building. The concern expressed by the Supreme Patriarch, the supreme leader of Thai Buddhism and Sangha monk management, during a meeting with Master Xuecheng on April 8, 2017, demonstrates the significance of political narratives in the context of Thai Buddhism, indicating the attention given to the development of Chinese Buddhism and the BAC (Han, 2017).

Overall, the data findings, analysis, and discussion shed light on the communicative process of strategic narratives in Chinese Buddhist diplomacy between China and Thailand. The use of Buddhism as a tool, the coherence of the narratives, and the targeted engagement with key stakeholders all contribute to the contestation and understanding of the communicative dynamics in this context.

Typology of strategic narratives

This section introduces the applications of strategic narratives typology, namely, system narratives, identity narratives, and issue narratives. These narratives are integrated into and follow the strict requirements of the world order (Roselle et al., 2014, p. 76). The first section focuses on narratives of the BRI and the significance of religious culture within system narratives to define characteristics of the complex broader context for identity narratives and issue narratives. The second section presents narratives on “the story of the state” as identity narratives and explores the emerging theme “Going out strategy”. The third section revolves around issue narratives, delving into the role of Buddhism in promoting and collaborating on the BRI. It also aims to maximize the positive influence of religious culture on the initiative in Thailand.

System narratives

Analysis identified three system narratives at work in the documents: the BRI, the “Chinese Dream”, and China’s peaceful rise. The primary system narrative is the BRI presenting a comprehensive development strategy covering political, economic, cultural, and religious fields (Buddhist Association of China, 2015d). The BRI aims to revitalize resources and is being supported and participated in by people and governments around the world (Ru, 2015). The BRI emphasizes the principles of peaceful cooperation, openness, and mutual benefit and portrays the initiative as a way to promote common development in many fields.

Within the system narrative of the BRI, we can see two other system narratives, that of the Chinese dream. The narrative I am calling the “Chinese dream”, is mentioned in various speeches and articles, for example:

“as Buddhists, we also have our own ideals and dreams...I have experienced the old society and the new China, and witnessed the great changes in the country and society, especially the achievements made in China's reform and opening up for more than 30 years, which made me full of confidence in building a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way, a prosperous, strong, democratic, civilized and harmonious modern socialist country”(Buddhist Association of China, 2013a).

We can interpret the Chinese dream as a way to rejuvenate the nation while pursuing peaceful development and cooperating with other countries to build a world that values peace, security, prosperity, openness, and inclusiveness (Buddhist Association of China, 2017b). As a result, the Chinese government has proposed the grand concept of “promoting the vision and action of promoting the joint construction of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road” (X. Cheng, 2015). President Xuecheng, the President of the BAC, pointed out that the Silk Road “inspires us to effectively play the role of the principle of "co-explanation, co-construction, and sharing" in the construction of the "Belt and Road" strategy” (Buddhist Association of China, 2015d). This system narrative highlights China’s commitment to international collaboration through cooperation, and its aspiration to play a leading role in global and regional development.

The last narrative revolves around the importance of cultural influence in China’s peaceful rise. The Chinese government recognizes that promoting Chinese culture globally is crucial for its peaceful development. In the context of the BRI, religious culture is specifically highlighted as a significant component. The BRI is regarded as a “religious road belt” (Buddhist Association of China, 2017b), emphasizing the role of religious culture in diplomacy and the construction of the initiative. This can be observed from the speeches of Xi Jinping, President of the PRC, that “fully implement the Party’s basic policy of religious work and give a full play to the positive role of religious people and religious believers in promoting economic and social development” (cited in Yufan, 2013). This narrative suggests that the Chinese government acknowledges the value of religious culture as a form of soft power in

advancing its diplomatic goals. Furthermore, the narratives of the principles of independence and actively carrying out religious “friendly exchanges” with foreign countries recurred several times throughout the dataset, for example:

“We must adhere to the principle of independence and self-employment, and actively carry out religious friendly exchanges with foreign countries. China's religious undertakings are handled independently by Chinese religious believers and are not controlled by foreign forces. It is based on the historical fact that China has suffered imperialist aggression and plunder for a long time, and some religions have been controlled and exploited by imperialism. It is an independent choice made by the religious people in China” (Zuo’an, 2013a).

“for decades, independent self-running, as an important principle for Chinese religions to handle foreign relations, has ensured the healthy development of religious undertakings and safeguarded national sovereignty and dignity, which has been understood and supported by religious organizations and people in many countries” (Buddhist Association of China, 2017b).

Employing system narratives, China seeks to shape the international system according to its interpretation and persuade other actors to recognize and align with its vision. System narratives portray “the nature of structure of international affairs, a structure that emerges and is sustained, changed, and transformed over time in a process in which the agency of the actors is inherent” (Miskimmon et al., 2014, p. 40). In the case of China, the positive role of religion in promoting economic and social development is portrayed as a fundamental requirement under the BRI (Zuo’an, 2013b). This can be seen in Xi Jinping’s speech that “the fundamental interests of the majority of believers and non-religious people and people who believe in different religions are consistent in terms of politics and economy, and the differences in ideology and beliefs are secondary”(cited in People’s Daily, 2016).

Overall, the system narrative allows us to see China’s strategic approach to diplomacy and its efforts to project a specific image and interpretation of the international system. The BRI serves as a comprehensive framework for China’s development strategy, emphasizing cooperation, mutual benefit, and openness. Furthermore, the significance of religious culture is highlighted as a means to enhance China cultural influence and enhance positive image in

international relations. These system narratives reflect China's aspiration to promote its peaceful rise, play a leading role in the regional affairs, particularly the Mekong countries, as well as engage in cooperative endeavours of shared prosperity. System narratives further illustrate the interactions of relevant actors within the international system. These actors can be classified into distinct categories such as "great powers, normal powers, rising powers, weak states, and rogue states"(Miskimmon et al., 2014, p. 51). China, as a rising power, actively strives for international recognition of its peaceful ascent.

Identity narratives

The identity narratives describe how actors perceive themselves and others, define their principles, values, and objectives, and create "an experience space intertwined with an envisioned space and delineated through horizons of experience and of possibility" (Roselle et al., 2014b, p. 76). Actors in international relations are divided into state, and non-state actors (Wijninga et al., 2014), and this research focuses on the first category, which pertains to how China views itself and other countries it engages with.

The story of the state

Identity narratives are further complemented by the depiction of China's identity through aspects of telling the "story of the state" as put forward by Ashiwa and Wank (2020) Three broad narratives emerged from the analysis: the cultural and historical significance of Chinese Buddhism, Sino-ization of Buddhism and core socialist values, Southern Buddhism and regional connectivity through Theravada Buddhism.

Cultural and historical significance of Chinese Buddhism

The documents reveal a narrative highlighting Buddhism's long history in China, its integration with Chinese Confucian and Taoist culture (Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, 2016) and the cultural importance of Chinese Buddhism (Buddhist Association of China, 2016a). It emphasises Buddhism's contributions to cultural development, ethnic integration, social harmony, and national unity. These narratives draw from historical references, underlining Buddhism's 2,000-year presence in China and its unique spiritual wealth, which encompasses compassion, tolerance, charity, and love for peace.

"Buddhism was introduced to China in 2 B.C. For more than 2,000 years, Buddhism has taken root in the fertile soil of China and penetrated into

the lives of the people, contributing to promoting the purification of people's hearts, cultural development, ethnic integration, social harmony and national unity”(Buddhist Association of China, 2015b).

“In the long history of 2,000 years, Chinese Buddhist culture has created the unique and brilliant spiritual wealth belonging to the Chinese nation, and forged the good qualities of the Chinese nation” (X. Cheng, 2015).

As noted by van Noort (2020), China utilises historical narratives to envision a peaceful and interconnected world order by translating traditional ideas and discourses on identity and an ideal international system into modern strategic communication (p. 187). The data emphasises the active engagement of the Chinese Buddhist community in contemporary society. It highlights the adaptation of Buddhism to a socialist society, the promotion of friendship with people from different countries, cultural exchanges, and contributions to world peace. Buddhist groups in several Mekong countries, including China, are forging new bonds of amity through collaborative exchanges, buoyed by China's current standing as a major world power (Buddhist Association of China, 2016a). Chinese culture, including Chinese Buddhism, are underscored as fundamental elements contributing to China's contemporary emergence as a world power. It can be interpreted that China is using Buddhism as one of the tools to solve the problems caused by or emerging from the BRI projects.

Sino-ization of Buddhism and core socialist values

China's national identity and the core values of socialism are closely intertwined in the examined documents. The narrative emphasises that Chinese Buddhism, as an integral part of China's traditional culture, is compatible with socialist core values. As mentioned in system narratives, this alignment strengthens the Chinese Dream — a collective national aspiration — and emphasises “its personal pursuit” for every Chinese citizen (Buddhist Association of China, 2015a). Core values of socialism⁹ were published for the first time in the report of the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012 to clarify the goals, orientation, and guidelines at the three levels of the state, society, and citizens (Zhou, 2014).

⁹ The socialist core values in 12 words: "Advocating prosperity, democracy, civilization, harmony, freedom, equality, justice and the rule of law, advocating patriotism, dedication, integrity and friendliness, and actively cultivating and practicing socialist core values."

Chinese Buddhism's role in promoting the core values of socialism as noted in the work of Ramachandran (2019), which suggests that religious theories can support the realisation of the Chinese Dream. The importance of ancestral culture in Han Buddhism and its influence on Chinese society and culture has not only accumulated the most profound spiritual aspirations of the Chinese people, thereby furnishing a plentiful source of nourishment for China's flourishing and advancement but had a responsibility to practice the core values of socialism (Buddhist Association of China, 2016a; Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, 2016).

Southern Buddhism and regional connectivity through Theravada Buddhism

First, the dominant discourse that emerged from the data collection shows that Chinese government and the BAC places importance on "Southern Buddhism", known as Theravada Buddhism (Panyagaew, 2010, p. 56) alongside the other two major branches, namely, Mahayana Buddhism and Vajrayana Buddhism. Moreover, Southern Buddhism has essential roles not only in China's foreign policy objectives in advancing its political and economic interests in Southeast Asia but also in maintaining border stability (Buddhist Association of China, 2015a) and national unity as well as establishing the country's image and a cultural window (Han, 2016) towards Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries.

"China's Southern Buddhism actively meets the challenges of the new era, explores feasible ways to carry out cultural cooperation between China and Southeast Asia, and comprehensively promotes the cooperation and harmonious development between China and Southeast Asian countries" (China Central Television, 2016).

Second, several important events organized by the BAC were observed from the data, for example, the second visit of Panchen Lama¹⁰ to Yunnan province in 2015. During his visit, he said "he is happy with the economic and social development and great achievements of Yunnan, as well as the good situation of national unity, religion and harmony" (Buddhist Association of China, 2015c). Classics and traditional Chinese cultural books, such as the

¹⁰ Tibetan Buddhism places great emphasis on the spiritual leadership of the Panchen Lama, who is regarded as the second most important figure in the religion after the Dalai Lama. However, the current Panchen Lama, Gyancaïn Norbu, was not appointed in the traditional manner. Instead, he was selected by the Chinese government in 1995 after they rejected the Panchen Lama who had been chosen by the Dalai Lama.

Complete Works of the Chinese Baye Sutra¹¹, Weixiandala¹², and Dai-Han Dictionary were donated to the Southern Buddhist Temples. This is done in order to support the development of Southern Buddhist education, improve the cultural level of Southern Buddhist monks, and promote communication between Han Buddhism and Pali Buddhism (Buddhist Association of China, 2016d)

Another interesting finding indicates that the BAC highly values the work of Southern Buddhism on Theravada Buddhism as a patriotic group and educational organisation. The BAC provided lectures on the Buddhist culture related to the "Belt and Road" to elucidate Buddhism's constructive role in the implementation of the BRI strategy (Buddhist Association of China, 2015d). At the first Southern Buddhist Summit Forum which was held in Jinghong City, Xishuangbanna on February 18, 2016. Jiang Jianyong, Deputy Director of SARA, said that:

“Yunnan Province would further strengthen the self-construction of Southern Buddhism, actively promote the construction of the Buddhist College of the Pali language family in China, accelerate the training of talents, adapt to the development of the times, strive to improve the ability and level of foreign exchanges, and actively explore the establishment of a national golden bond of Buddhism along the Mekong River Basin in the new era” (Buddhist Association of China, 2016b).

Third, the significance of fostering Buddhist interactions with other nations and regions along the Belt and Road Initiative is emphasized, underscoring Buddhism's role in facilitating communication and strengthening bonds. The narrative highlights Buddhism's function as a medium between China and the world, bridging the past and the future (Buddhist Association of China, 2015d).

“Buddhism can play an important and active role in promoting the Belt and Road Initiative... in the dialogue between different religions, the

¹¹ Buddhist scriptures which are engraved on the leaves of the Bedoro tree.

¹² Weixiandala known as Prince Vishontra who was a devoted follower of the Buddha. He pursued Buddha's teachings and engaged in numerous acts of charity, giving away his wealth and possessions. He attained enlightenment and became a Buddha himself.

integration of different cultures, ... and the exchange between different regions” (Ru, 2015).

“If the Belt and Road Initiative connects history at one end and points to the future at one end; China at one end and the world at the other end, then Buddhism is an important link connecting the two ends”(Buddhist Association of China, 2016c).

Applying the theory of strategic narratives to these themes emerging from the dataset allow us to see how these identity narratives play a pivotal role in shaping China’s foreign policy as they are deeply rooted in its history, culture, and identity. This helps us to understand how the Chinese government has strategically utilised Southern Buddhism to support the BRI in Thailand.

The analysis reveals a dominant discourse that underscores the significance of Southern Buddhism, specifically Theravada Buddhism, within China's identity narratives. Theravada Buddhism is portrayed as a conduit for communication, cultural exchange, and strengthening bonds between China and Southeast Asian countries. It emphasises the need for the three primary language schools of Buddhism (Han, Tibetan, and Southern - Pali language) to learn from each other, promote joint development, and enhance communication. By emphasising Southern Buddhism, China aims to foster connections based on shared history, neighbourly relations, and increased connectivity through infrastructure projects like high-speed rail. This approach facilitates China's political, economic, and cultural interests in Southeast Asia through its “Going out strategy” discussed below.

Going out strategy

Further analysis of the data reveals the role of Buddhism in the “Going out” phase of foreign exchange and the dissemination of China's voice, fully telling Chinese stories (Buddhist Association of China, 2017c). The “Going out” strategy was seen in the speech of Xi Jinping, President of the People’s Republic of China, that “We firmly believe that the spread of the spirit of Chinese Buddhism will be affectionate by the world and blessings and contribute to the resolution of the global crisis and the resolution of global problems” (X. Cheng, 2015). It highlights the potential for Chinese Buddhism to contribute to cultural exchanges, expand international cooperation, and promote Chinese Buddhist values worldwide. At the same time, the plots observed in the data are the resistance against negative roles of religion, illegal activities and foreign religions, the promotion of patriotism and love

for religion, and the inheritance and promotion of traditional Chinese culture (Buddhist Association of China, 2017a).

In this study, the author proposes that the Going Out strategy should be read as the “Going South strategy”, highlighting the use of Southern Buddhism, particularly Theravada Buddhism, in the cultural exchange and mutual learning of different Buddhist traditions and countries, in the context of the BRI. This theme reflects the value placed on cross-cultural understanding and cooperation. The documents contain multiple references to cultural exchanges and cooperation between Chinese Buddhists and international counterparts, particularly with Thai Buddhist circles. One of the prominent cases is when Somdet Phra Maha Ratchamongkolmuni (Somdet Thong Chai) founded the First Confucius Institute of Maritime Silk Road, which introduced a new way to promote Chinese language, culture, and history across educational institutions, government offices, and private organisations. He emphasised that Chinese President Xi Jinping's "One Belt and One Road" diplomatic strategy is a crucial contribution to world peace and the development of neighbouring countries. Establishing the Confucius Institute of Maritime Silk Road aims to improve Chinese language education in Thailand, serving as a key hub on the Maritime Silk Road and facilitating exchanges between China and Thailand across various domains (Phraprommangkalachan, 2015).

In conclusion, the findings shed light on the identity narratives of Buddhism employed by China within the Belt and Road Initiative framework. Chinese Buddhism is presented as an essential component of China's national identity, supporting the country's core socialist values, and promoting global cooperation. The emphasis on Southern Buddhism further establishes cultural connections, paving the way for closer relations with neighbouring countries in Southeast Asia. Understanding these identity narratives is crucial for comprehending China's role and motivations in international relations and its pursuit of cultural diplomacy through the BRI. Besides, understanding the identity narratives outlined in this study is crucial for comprehending these actors' roles in forming issue narratives as the third type of strategic narratives.

Issue narratives

The findings of the narrative analysis highlight several important aspects of the issue narratives, including educational and cultural exchanges, the internationalisation of Buddhist education, and the integration of Chinese religious traditions. Examples of key activities and

discourses are presented to demonstrate the chronological progression of these exchanges and Buddhism's positive role in promoting cultural understanding and friendship between the two countries. The section concludes with a discussion of the main question of the thesis and further analysis.

Educational and cultural exchanges

Documents emphasise the significance of conducting research on religious culture and harnessing the positive influence of religion and religious figures. The BRI is seen as an opportunity for China to strengthen religious and cultural exchanges with countries along the route. By doing so, they can promote development, expand the influence of China's unique religious culture, and contribute to the advancement of the BRI. Furthermore, the analysis reveals the implementation of educational and cultural exchanges as a part of the BRI. These exchanges support the "Going out" strategy in the identity narratives, particularly emphasising the Sino-Thailand Buddhist exchange.

The ordination of the first Thai government official in the history of the Sino-Thai cultural exchange was held in China in 2013. Master Shi Yinshun, Vice President of the Buddhist Association of China, said that "he opened a new page of Sino-Thai Buddhist cultural exchange. He will integrate Thai Hinayana Buddhism with Chinese Mahayana Buddhism to better play the role of Buddhism in purifying people's hearts and guiding the world" (Buddhist Association of China, 2013b).

In 2013, the relics of Master Ben Huan, the former honorary president of the BAC and the founder of Hongfa Temple, were delivered to Thailand for the permanent exhibition. Qin Yusen, cultural counsellor of the Chinese Embassy in Thailand, said that "it is an important exchange activity between China and Thailand in Buddhism and plays a unique and positive role in promoting cultural exchanges and promoting exchanges between the two peoples" (Ning & Li, 2013) so that more Thais could understand Chinese Buddhism.

In 2015, the Communist Party secretary of Hainan province expressed interest in enhancing Buddhist cooperation between China and Southeast Asia as a part of the Belt and Road Initiative during a visit to Thailand. Subsequently, a college was established in Hainan to facilitate this cooperation (Zawacki, 2021).

Internationalization of Buddhist education

The internationalisation of Buddhist education is also identified as a key aspect of the issue narrative. Efforts are being made to cultivate bilingual talents and enhance Buddhist

cooperation between China and Southeast Asia in 2016 (Buddhist Association of China, 2016c). The establishment of Buddhist colleges, joint research centres, and the translation of important Buddhist texts into Thai exemplify the international expansion of Buddhist education. The evidence of the internationalisation of Buddhist education can be seen in the cases as follows

In 2017, the Sangha Supreme Council of Thailand sent a delegation to attend the college's opening ceremony. Since then, Buddhist leaders and organisations in Yunnan, Guangdong, and Hainan have exchanged visits with their counterparts in Thailand to discuss the BRI (Zawacki, 2021). In the same year, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University sent monks to a conference in Hong Kong that focused on “Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism along the One Belt, One Road” (Zawacki, 2021). Besides, Master Hsing Yun founded a Buddhist college in Thailand to educate individuals with Buddhist expertise and understanding and built the Golden Guanyin statue at Taihua Temple in Bangkok. Master Hsing Yun stressed that,

“There is a saying in China that the belief of Guanyin Bodhisattva has been widely spread for thousands of years and has long been well known and deeply rooted in the hearts of the people. Today, with the support of the Thai government, ...the auspicious Golden Guanyin statue of Taihua Temple in Bangkok was successfully completed. It embodies...the spirit of friendship and cooperation between the North and the South Buddhism, and the fine tradition of friendship between the people of China and Thailand for generations” (Han, 2017).

Furthermore, the international expansion of Buddhist education is exemplified by the advancement of long-established Buddhist universities in Thailand. As stated by the Rector of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, “the achievements of Chinese Buddhism in education and other undertakings, and praised the important role played by the Chinese Buddhist Association in deepening the friendship between China and Thailand” (Chen, 2013). An illustrative instance of such narratives can be observed in establishing collaborative research centres such as the Belt and Road Cooperation Research Center, which brings together the National Research Council of Thailand and the Renmin University of China. Notably, within these institutions, Buddhism holds significance as a research area, exemplified

by the translation and publication of the book "Chinese Buddhism and Traditional Culture" by the Thailand-China Strategic Research Center (Huizhe, 2018).

Integrating Chinese religious traditions

The BAC has set specific goals to promote national unity, border stability, and friendly relations with Thailand and other Southeast Asian countries. The narrative emphasises the importance of integrating Chinese religious traditions with modern concepts and making religion more influential in governance.

“China should adhere to the principle of good to neighbour and companion, comprehensively promote the exchange and communication of religious cultures in various countries, integrate the excellent traditions of Chinese religion with modern concepts ...and make it a political important force that is more influential in governance, more affinity in image, and more charismatic in morality” (Buddhist Association of China, 2017b).

Conclusion

Applying issue narratives as the third type of strategic narrative serves the purpose of assigning precise meanings to events and strategically shaping policy discussions in a manner that aligns with the interests of the actors behind their creation. These narratives are used to influence the decision-making process and generate public support for particular courses of action. The ultimate goal is to decisively shape the actions, behaviour, and outcome of a particular situation or conflict (Miskimmon et al., 2014, p. 16; Roselle et al., 2014, p. 76).

The issue narratives surrounding Buddhism and the BRI aims to shape the discussion of policies and influence the decision-making process. They seek to generate public support for promoting cultural exchange and highlight the positive impact of religious culture on the BRI. Thereby, the main strategic narrative by the Chinese government is the creation of a positive perception of themselves in Thailand, which aligns with Xu (2015) ’s suggestion that international religious image is essential for China’s soft power. The narratives align with China's goal of being a peaceful rising power and demonstrates the potential of Buddhism to strengthen ties between China and Thailand.

Actors use issue narratives to significantly impact the behaviour, actions, and results of a particular situation or conflict. They do this to influence the decision-making process and

garner public support for specific courses of action (Roselle et al., 2014b, p. 76). For China, Buddhist leaders and institutions, particularly the BAC and educational institutions, are previously identified in forming the communicative processes to incorporate them into its strategic narratives. The purpose is to integrate them into China's strategic narratives, utilising their voices and statements to strengthen and advance China's narrative concerning its relationship with Buddhism. Moreover, issue narratives are intertwined with the other two categories of narratives, with some of the characteristics of the narratives targeted by the Chinese government towards foreign audiences already discussed in the previous sections.

With regards to problems occurring from the BRI-related projects mentioned in the background of this study, the author sees that the commonality of Buddhism through the use of Theravada Buddhism practices and the going out strategy presented in identity narratives is strong enough so it can bridge any gap in conflicts and help people to find peaceful resolutions and contribute to mutual understanding. This study aligns with the viewpoint of Dhammhaso and Peoples (2018), suggesting that the likelihood of wars occurring between nations within the Buddhist community in today's globalised world is very low. It can be attributed to the Buddhist teachings' strong emphasis on peaceful methods and conflict resolution towards harmonious and prosperous societies (Dhammhaso and Peoples, 2018). This could also be a strategic narrative for Thailand as it seeks to promote its cultural heritage and attract Buddhists and tourists, particularly Chinese tourists (China Radio International, 2017), who are interested in Buddhist sites and practices to visit Thailand, while the country is seeking to maintain the national identity and counterbalance the influence from China through religious cooperation.

The emergence of China as a global power has led to the increasing Chinese influence in Asia and the Chinese side has been using Buddhism to support the BRI at multiple layers and levels in combination with other measures, such as economic support and political power, in the region and the world. Such a narratives strategies help to reduce the negative perception of China as a threat in Thailand for a long time. However, the author agrees with Yeo and Gloria (2023) that mediating the effect of Chinese influence depends on national identity. For Thailand, Buddhism has a long history from the past to the present. It is deeply connected to people's lives and Thai collective identity – the nation, the religion, and the monarchy. Buddhism has influenced the country's nationalist ideology (Scupin & Joll, 2020, pp. 109–110), even though Buddhism is still not Thailand's state religion. As a result, this strong

existing relationship between Buddhism and national identity potentially contributes to reducing Chinese influence in the country.

Moreover, Thai Buddhism has deep cultural ties with other countries such as Sri Lanka, India, and its neighbouring countries, Cambodia, and Laos. It underlines the country's cultural resilience in serving as a mechanism to potentially counterbalance the influence of China. Thailand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs have themselves been employing Buddhism as one of its public diplomacies (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, 2022). Efforts serve to strengthen a unique national identity and cultivate a profound sense of pride and solidarity within the Thai populace.

9. Conclusion

The primary objective of this thesis was to examine how the Chinese government utilises Buddhism to advance the BRI in Thailand, focusing on strategic narratives. The research also explored the communicative processes involved in this endeavour.

The notable findings of this study indicate that system narratives on Chinese Buddhist diplomacy are shaped by both religious and political institutions such as the BAC and the UFWD. These narratives revolve around the BRI, the “Chinese Dream”, and China’s peaceful rise. Moreover, Buddhism is strategically employed by the Chinese government as a tool to address challenges arising from BRI projects. We can see that Chinese government has been working to build “influence at the ideational level” (Raymond, 2020, pp. 356-347) by employing narratives that persuade other actors to recognize China’s interpretation of the international system as significant and valuable. Identity narratives are employed to promote Southern Buddhism as an integral part of Chinese culture, fostering a sense of commonality between China and Thailand. Therefore, Theravada Buddhism serves as a linkage for China’s regional connectivity with Thailand. Besides, a theme observed in identity narratives is the Going out strategy and it is further developed and employed in issue narratives through educational and cultural exchanges, the internationalisation of Buddhist education, and the integration of Chinese religious traditions. As suggested by Cheng (2020), these narratives are tailored to fit with the local context in Thailand economic factors and political influence (p. 12).

Future research could focus on conducting longitudinal studies to track the perceptions of different segments of the Thai population regarding these strategic narratives and their impact on attitudes and behaviours. Moreover, it is crucial for Thailand to navigate its cooperation with the BRI carefully, considering the varying perspectives and reactions among different sectors. While China is an important trading partner and a significant source of income for Thailand, maintaining a balance of power with other global players and avoiding potential conflicts is essential.

In conclusion, political actors view strategic narratives as a significant tool for persuasion in achieving strategic advantages. They typically utilise narratives that can engage with those put forth by other actors and challenge them, with the aim of manoeuvring each other to gain backing for their own long-term objectives (Miskimmon et al., 2013, pp. 7–8). The current state of international affairs clearly demonstrates that global politics is now a

stage in which an actor's success depends "not only on whose army wins but ultimately on whose story wins" (Nye, 2004, p. 106). This highlights the critical role of strategic narratives in contemporary politics as influential instruments for achieving success in the global arena. The ability to employ convincing and impactful narratives to challenge opposing actors has become an essential element of any successful political strategy. Therefore, comprehending the mechanisms and intricacies of strategic narratives holds immense significance as a determinant in shaping the trajectory of present-day global politics.

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11. Appendix

1. China Radio International

- 1.1. จับโอกาสที่สำคัญ ผลักดันความสัมพันธ์จีน-ไทยสู่มิติใหม่ (How do we continue to develop China-Thai relations?)
<https://thai.cri.cn/247/2017/11/20/242s260883.htm>
- 1.2. คลังสมองจีนบรรยาย "เส้นทางพัฒนาของจีนและความหมายทางสากล" (China's Development Path and International Meaning) China Radio International
<https://thai.cri.cn/247/2018/03/26/242s265640.html>
- 1.3. ประธานคณะกรรมการประจำสภาผู้แทนประชาชนจีนเฝ้าสมเด็จพระเทพรัตนราชสุดาฯ สยามบรมราชกุมารี (Chairman of the Board of Directors of the People's Representatives of China to meet Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn)
- 1.4. สุชาติ ดันเจริญนำทีมเยือนไหหลำ กระชับความสัมพันธ์ไทยจีน (Suchart Tancharoen leads the team to visit Hainan to strengthen Thai-Chinese relations.)
<https://thai.cri.cn/247/2018/03/26/62s265659.html>

2. National Office of Buddhism of Thailand

- 2.1. รองประธานคณะกรรมการแห่งชาติและศาสนา คณะกรรมการแห่งสาธารณรัฐประชาชนจีน พร้อมคณะ เข้าเยี่ยมชมสำนักงานพระพุทธศาสนาแห่งชาติ (Vice Chairman of the National and Religious Committee, the Board of Directors of the People's Republic of China, together with the delegation visited the National Buddhism Office)
<https://www.onab.go.th/th/content/category/detail/id/9/iid/2562>

3. Buddhist Association of China

- 3.1. 中国佛教协会举办“一带一路”佛教文化系列讲座第一讲 (The Buddhist Association of China held the first lecture on the "Belt and Road" Buddhist culture series) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/yw1/2015-06-08/9053.html>
- 3.2. 福建佛教界积极服务“一带一路”建设 (Fujian Buddhist community actively serves the construction of the "Belt and Road Initiative")
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/fj/2015-07-07/9146.html>

- 3.3. 新时期 新使命 新担当 ——在中国佛教协会第九次全国代表会议闭幕式上的讲话 (New Era, New Mission, New Responsibility - Speech at the Closing Ceremony of the Ninth National Congress of the Chinese Buddhist Association)
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/djc/yfwj/2015-04-27/8697.html>
- 3.4. 中国佛教协会第九次全国代表会议决议 (Resolution of the Ninth National Congress of the Buddhist Association of China)
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/djc/yfwj/2015-04-27/8698.html>
- 3.5. 陕西省宗教局召开发挥宗教文化在“一带一路”建设中积极作用研讨会 (Shaanxi Provincial Bureau of Religion held a seminar on giving full play to the positive role of religious culture in the construction of the Belt and Road Initiative)
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/fj/2015-09-14/9357.html>
- 3.6. 在中国佛教协会第九次全国代表会议闭幕上的发言 (Speech at the closing of the 9th National Congress of the Chinese Buddhist Association)
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/djc/yfwj/2015-05-04/8735.htm>
- 3.7. 中国佛教与海上丝绸之路”学术研讨会在广东珠海隆重召开 (The academic seminar on "Chinese Buddhism and the Maritime Silk Road" was held in Zhuhai, Guangdong) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jl/2015-11-26/10116.html>
- 3.8. 中国佛教协会举办“一带一路”佛教文化系列讲座第一讲 (The Buddhist Association of China held the first lecture on the "Belt and Road" Buddhist culture series) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/yw1/2015-06-08/9053.html>
- 3.9. 泰国佛教代表团一行来访 (A delegation of Thai Buddhists visited)
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jliu/2016-03-29/10422.html>
- 3.10. 培养佛教双语人才 助力“一带一路” (Cultivate bilingual Buddhist talents to help the "Belt and Road Initiative") <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jl/2016-08-11/11230.html>
- 3.11. 发挥好宗教文化在“一带一路”战略中的作用 (Give full play to the role of religious culture in the "Belt and Road" strategy)
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jl/2017-04-27/12810.html>

- 3.12. 黄夏年：汉传佛教祖庭文化与“一带一路” (Ancestral Culture of Han Buddhism and the "Belt and Road Initiative")
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/special/hcfjztyth2016/lchy11/hy11/2016-11-14/12158.html>
- 3.13. 中国佛教协会南传佛教福慧袈裟布施仪式在云南临沧孟定洞景佛寺隆重举行 (The blessing ceremony of the Southern Buddhist Fuhui of the Chinese Buddhist Association was held in the Dongjing Buddhist Temple in Lincang, Yunnan Province) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/yw1/2016-11-07/12093.html>
- 3.14. 首届“一带一路”沿线国家《心经》文化论坛在江苏南京召开 (The first "Heart Sutra" Cultural Forum for countries along the "Belt and Road" was held in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province Buddhist Association of China)
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw1/gdfx/2017-08-03/33222.html>
- 3.15. 首届南传佛教高峰论坛在西双版纳隆重举行 (The first Southern Buddhist Summit Forum was held in Xishuangbanna)
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/fj/2016-02-18/10310.html>
- 3.16. 聚焦文化“走出去” “一带一路”与中华文化论坛举行 (Focusing on Culture "Going Out" "Belt and Road" and Chinese Culture Forum was held on)
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/e/action/ShowInfo.php?classid=508&id=38579>
- 3.17. 中泰两国友谊和海峡两岸佛教交流 书写佛教发展新篇章 (Friendship between China and Thailand and Buddhist exchanges between the two sides of the Taiwan Straits, writing a new chapter in the development of Buddhism)
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/special/hcfjztyth2016/lchy11/hy11/2016-11-14/12146.html>
- 3.18. 发挥好宗教文化在“一带一路”战略中的作用 (Give full play to the role of religious culture in the "Belt and Road" strategy)
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw1/gdfx/2017-08-03/36631.html>
- 3.19. 发挥宗教正能量 践行社会主义核心价值观 (Give full play to the positive energy of religion and practice the core values of socialism)
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jj/2014-03-21/5684.html>

- 3.20. 帕松列龙庄勳提案《加强中国南传佛教建设维护民族团结促进边疆稳定》(Pasone Lielongzhuang Meng proposed to strengthen the construction of Buddhism in the south of China, maintain national unity and promote border stability) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jj/2017-03-08/12629.html>
- 3.21. 中国三大语系佛教界在佛牙舍利塔下庆祝2017佛诞节 五国驻华大使出席 (The Buddhist circles of the three major language schools in China celebrated the 2017 Buddha's Birthday. The ambassadors of five countries to China attended.) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/yw1/2017-05-03/12817.html>
- 3.22. 噶尔哇·阿旺桑波：一带一路上传播的佛学文化 (Gah Awangsambo: Buddhist culture spread along the Belt and Road) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/e/action/ShowInfo.php?classid=684&id=39956>
- 3.23. 本性：“一带一路”视野下佛教教育的国际化进程(The internationalization process of Buddhist education under the perspective of the "Belt and Road Initiative") <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/e/action/ShowInfo.php?classid=684&id=39961>
- 3.24. (泰国) Phramaha Hansa Dhammhaso : No River, No Peace: Buddhism along the Mekong River <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/e/action/ShowInfo.php?classid=690&id=40111>
- 3.25. 耀智：一带一路的使命 (Yaozhi: The Mission of the Belt and Road Initiative) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/e/action/ShowInfo.php?classid=684&id=39960>
- 3.26. 中国佛教协会庆祝佛诞节寄语 (Message from the Chinese Buddhist Association to celebrate Buddha's birthday) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jj/2015-05-25/8992.html>
- 3.27. 关于《中国佛教协会章程（修订草案）》的说明 (Notes on the Constitution of the Buddhist Association of China (Revised Draft)) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/djc/xdzc/2015-04-27/8700.html>
- 3.28. 爱国爱教 持戒守法 让藏传佛教为中国佛教事业做出更大的贡献——在中国佛教协会第九次全国代表会议闭幕式上的发言 (Patriotism and religion, China Buddhist Association 9th National Representative Conference Closing Ceremony Speech)

abiding by the law, let Tibetan Buddhism make greater contributions to the cause of Chinese Buddhism - Speech at the Closing Ceremony of the Ninth National Congress of the Chinese Buddhist Association)

<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/djc/yfwj/2015-05-04/8737.html>

- 3.29. 中国佛教协会赴云南边境地区开展慈善调研活动（三）(The Buddhist Association of China went to the border area of Yunnan to carry out charity research activities (3)) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/yw1/2016-02-22/10321.html>
- 3.30. 中国佛教协会赴云南边境地区开展慈善调研活动（四）(The Buddhist Association of China went to the border area of Yunnan to carry out charity research activities (4)) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/yw1/2016-02-23/10323.html>
- 3.31. 中泰两国佛教领袖相聚曼谷 一脉相承共创未来 (Buddhist leaders from China and Thailand meet in Bangkok to create the future together) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jliu/2017-04-10/12740.html>
- 3.32. 泰国政府外交部敦·帕玛威奈部长赠送北京灵光寺泰国国王御赐供养僧衣 (Minister of the Thai Government's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Don Parmawinai, presented the Thai King's offerings to Beijing Lingguang Temple) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/e/action/ShowInfo.php?classid=506&id=38796>
- 3.33. 博鳌亚洲论坛2017年会佛教分论坛在海南博鳌举行 (The Buddhist sub-forum of the Boao Forum for Asia 2017 was held in Boao, Hainan) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/fj/2017-03-27/12697.html>
- 3.34. 国家宗教事务局：禁止行政命令简单粗暴处理宗教问题 (State Bureau of Religious Affairs: Banning executive orders to deal with religious issues)
- 3.35. 第二届中国佛门考试在泰国曼谷达摩寺举行 (The second Chinese Buddhist Examination was held at Dharma Temple in Bangkok, Thailand)
- 3.36. 我会祜巴龙庄劫副会长率团赴泰出席庆祝泰僧王智护尊者百岁寿辰暨“联合国卫塞节”庆典十周年纪念大会 (Vice President Huba Longzhuang Meng led a delegation to Thailand) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jliu/2013-05-31/2869.html>

- 3.37. 挖掘优秀佛教文化资源结合时代创新发展——佛教界培育和践行社会主义核心价值观的努力与探索(Excavating excellent Buddhist cultural resources combined with the innovation and development of the times - the efforts and exploration of the Buddhist community to cultivate and practice socialist core values)
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jj/2016-04-22/10482.html>
- 3.38. 中国佛教协会组织“中国梦”学习研讨活动 (Chinese Buddhist Association organizes "Chinese Dream" study and seminar activities)
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jj/2013-03-29/2510.html>
- 3.39. 高僧舍利赴泰 佛教交流掀高潮 (Senior monk's relic went to Thailand, Buddhist exchanges for the permanent exhibition)
- 3.40. 泰国上议院第一副议长素拉猜。李布拉一行参观少林寺 (Sulachai, First Deputy Speaker of the National Legislative Assembly of Thailand. visited the Shaolin Temple)
- 3.41. 泰国宗教官员在华短期出家 (Thai religious officials have been a monk in China for a short time) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jliu/2013-04-03/2533.html>
- 3.42. 中国佛教代表团应“世佛联”邀请访问泰国 (The Chinese Buddhist delegation visited Thailand at the invitation of the "World Buddha Federation")
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jliu/2013-10-02/3884.html>
- 3.43. 第27届世界佛教徒联谊会大会 新闻发布会在京举行 (The press conference of the 27th World Buddhist Association Conference was held in Beijing)
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/WFB27th/hdbd/2014-07-01/6239.html>
- 3.44. 班禅额尔德尼·确吉杰布到云南参观学习并举行佛事活动 (Panchen Erdeni Cojjeb went to Yunnan to visit and study and hold Buddhist activities)
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jj/2015-06-03/9037.html>
- 3.45. 习近平谈佛教 开中国领导人先河 (Xi Jinping talks about Buddhism)
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jj/2015-06-19/9101.html>

- 3.46. 中国佛教协会赴云南边境地区开展慈善调研活动（一）(The Buddhist Association of China went to the border area of Yunnan to carry out charity research activities (1)) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/yw1/2016-02-20/10315.html>
- 3.47. 中国佛教协会赴云南边境地区开展慈善调研活动（五）(The Buddhist Association of China went to the border area of Yunnan to carry out charity research activities) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/yw1/2016-02-25/10325.html>
- 3.48. 抹黑佛教的用意何在？(What is the purpose of discrediting Buddhism?) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jj/2016-05-04/10534.html>
- 3.49. 中国佛教协会赴云南边境地区开展慈善调研活动（二）(The Buddhist Association of China went to Yunnan border areas to carry out charity research activities (2)) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/yw1/2016-02-21/10319.html>
- 3.50. 聚焦两会：关于宗教工作 李总理、俞主席这样说 (Focus on the Two Sessions: About religious work, Premier Li and Chairman Yu said so) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jj/2017-03-07/12626.html>
- 3.51. 印顺副总裁率团出席泰国高僧王图比法会 (Yinshun Vice President led a delegation to Thailand) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/fj/2013-12-31/4983.html>
- 3.52. 严珏副校长被泰国玛哈朱拉隆贡大学授予荣誉博士学位 (Vice President Yan Jue was awarded an honorary doctorate from Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University)
- 3.53. 泰国佛教代表团赴北京灵光寺参拜佛牙舍利 (Thai Buddhist delegation went to Lingguang Temple in Beijing to visit Buddha's tooth relic) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jliu/2016-03-28/10417.html>
- 3.54. 世界佛教徒联谊会第86次执委会在曼谷召开 (The 86th Executive Committee of the World Buddhist Association was held in Bangkok) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jliu/2016-03-24/10405.html>
- 3.55. 演觉副会长荣获泰国摩诃朱拉隆功大学荣誉博士学位 (Vice President Yan Jue received an honorary doctorate Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University)

Buddhist Association of China <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jliu/2016-05-17/10568.html>

- 3.56. 我会派团赴泰国出席第三届佛教大学国际协会会议 (send a delegation to Thailand to attend the 3rd meeting of the International Association of Buddhist Universities) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jliu/2017-05-11/12841.html>
- 3.57. 中国东南亚发布民间合作倡议书：共建“一带一路” (China and Southeast Asia issued a non-governmental cooperation initiative: jointly build the "Belt and Road Initiative") <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jj/2015-06-01/9024.html>
- 3.58. 中泰两国友谊和海峡两岸佛教交流 书写佛教发展新篇章 (Friendship between China and Thailand and Buddhist exchanges between the two sides of the Taiwan Straits, writing a new chapter in the development of Buddhism) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jliu/2017-04-10/12742.html>
- 3.59. 泰国摩诃朱拉隆功大学校长帕·菩拉玛攀迪长老率团访问北京灵光寺 (President of Maha Chulalongkorn University in Thailand, led a delegation to visit Beijing Lingguang Temple) https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jliu/2013-10-16/4066_2.html
- 3.60. 道慈副会长荣获泰国摩诃朱拉隆功大学荣誉博士学位 (Vice President Daici received an honorary doctorate from Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University in Thailand) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jliu/2014-09-09/6832.html>
- 3.61. 泰国立法议会主席蓬佩参拜北京灵光寺 (Thai Legislative Assembly – the Chairman visits Beijing Lingguang Temple) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jliu/2016-05-29/10586.html>
- 3.62. 泰国摩诃朱拉隆功大学校长颂金长老 (A congratulatory message from the Rector Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, Thailand)
- 3.63. 严珏副校长会见泰国玛哈朱拉隆功大学沙威副校长 (Vice President Yan Jue met with the Vice President of Javert of Maha Chulalongkorn University in Thailand) Buddhist Association of China (link expired)

- 3.64. 泰国国王的贺信 (Royal Message of His Majesty the King of Thailand
Delivered by His Majesty's Representative on the Occasion of the Opening
Ceremony of the 27th General Conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists in
Baoji City, Shaanxi Province, the People's Republic of China)
https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/WFB27th/kms/2014-10-17/7114_2.html
- 3.65. 泰国最高僧伽委员会委员、摩诃朱拉隆功大学校长 (Dharma Address by
the most venerable Prof. Dr. Phra Brahmapundit, Rector of
Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, President of the International Council
for the Day of Vesak (ICDV), Member of the Supreme Sangha Council of Thailand,
At Famen Temple, Shaanxi, People's Republic of China, October 16, 2014.)
https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/WFB27th/kms/2014-10-17/7099_2.html
- 3.66. 泰国佛教界文化访问团一行到河南嵩山少林寺参访 (A delegation of Thai
Buddhist culture visited Shaolin Temple in Songshan, Henan Province) Buddhist
Association of China (link expired)
- 3.67. 泰国玛豪拉龙功大学副校长沙威参观上海玉佛寺 (Vice President Maha
Chulalongkorn University in Thailand visited the Jade Buddha Temple in Shanghai)

4. People's Daily

- 4.1. 善待宗教应成共识 (Being kind to a religion should be a consensus)
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jj/2013-07-26/3371.html>
- 4.2. [全国两会] 湛如法师：弘扬社会主义核心价值观 中国宗教应发挥潜能作用
([National Two Sessions] Master Zhan Ru: Carry forward the core values of
socialism. Chinese religion should play a potential role)
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jj/2015-03-17/8472.html>
- 4.3. [全国两会] 湛如法师：弘扬社会主义核心价值观 中国宗教应发挥潜能作用
([National Two Sessions] Master Zhan Ru: Carry forward the core values of
socialism. Chinese religion should play a potential role)
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jj/2015-03-17/8472.html>

- 4.4. 《人民日报》：全面提高新形势下宗教工作水平 (Comprehensively improve the level of religious work under the new situation)
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/fj/2016-04-26/10501.html>
- 4.5. 不断开创马克思主义宗教理论的新境界——二〇〇一年以来党的宗教工作理论政策成就 Buddhist Association of China (Constantly creating a new realm of Marxist religious theory - the Party's theoretical and policy achievements in religious work since 2010) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jj/2016-04-24/10490.html>
- 4.6. 关于在全国佛教界继续大力开展文明敬香建设生态寺院活动的倡议书 (Proposal on continuing to vigorously carry out civilized and fragrant construction of ecological monasteries in the national Buddhist community)
<http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2014/0110/c70731-24085957.html>
- 4.7. 不断开创马克思主义宗教理论的新境界——二〇〇一年以来党的宗教工作理论政策成就 (Constantly creating a new realm of Marxist religious theory - the Party's theoretical and policy achievements in religious work since 2010)
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jj/2016-04-24/10490.html>

5. China News Service

- 5.1. 中国东南亚发布民间合作倡议书：共建“一带一路” (China and Southeast Asia issued a non-governmental cooperation initiative: jointly build the "Belt and Road Initiative") <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jj/2015-06-01/9024.html>

6. China Central Television (CCTV)

- 6.1. 央广网：班禅额尔德尼·确吉杰布的“宗教领袖对话” (CCTV: Panchen Erdeni Cojjeb's "Dialogue with Religious Leaders")
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jj/2016-03-29/10421.html>
- 6.2. 首届南传佛教高峰论坛开幕 中外百名高僧学者赴会 (The First Southern Buddhism Summit Forum opened. Hundreds of Chinese and foreign monks and scholars came to the meeting.)
<http://news.cntv.cn/2016/02/18/ARTILj7plN5GoQxLe28z75yT160218.shtml>

- 6.3. 泰国副僧王的华文情结：当佛音与汉语相遇 - 佛教- 凤凰网 (When the Buddha's voice meets Chinese)

7. State Administration of Religious Affairs

- 7.1. 国家宗教事务局致全国佛教界佛诞节贺信 (Letter from the State Administration of Religious Affairs to the National Buddhist National Buddhist Birthday)
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jj/2016-05-14/10566.html>
- 7.2. 国家宗教局王作安局长倡导新形势下的宗教工作理念 (Director Wang Zuo'an of the State Administration of Religion advocates the concept of religious work under the new situation) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jj/2013-01-05/2127.html>
- 7.3. 致佛教界朋友的佛诞贺信 (A letter from Buddha's birthday to friends in the Buddhist world) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jj/2013-05-28/2841.html>
- 7.4. 国家宗教局召开2013年全国宗教工作会议 (The State Administration of Religion held the 2013 National Religious Work Conference)
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jj/2013-01-10/2144.html>
- 7.5. 王作安：任何政客都不能忽视宗教问题 (Wang Zuo'an: No politician can ignore religious issues)
- 7.6. 第四届世界佛教论坛新闻发布会在无锡灵山举行 (The press conference of the 4th World Buddhist Forum was held in Lingshan, Wuxi)
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/special/2015wbf4th/baodao/2015-10-23/9882.html>
- 7.7. 国家宗教事务局举办第九期宗教工作论坛 (The State Administration of Religious Affairs held the ninth religious work forum)
<https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jj/2015-06-15/9074.html>
- 7.8. 国家宗教事务局政府信息公开2012年度报告 (2012 Annual Report on the Disclosure of Government Information of the State Administration of Religious Affairs) http://www.gov.cn/gzdt/2013-03/29/content_2365702.html

8. The State Council of the People's Republic of China

8.1. 怎样进一步做好宗教工作? (How to do more religious work?)

http://www.gov.cn/2013zfbgjjd/content_2365495.html

9. Ta Kung Pao (大公报)

9.1. 【全国两会】解读2015年政协报告宗教领域6大重要变化 ([National Two

Sessions] Interpretation of 6 important changes in the religious field in the 2015

CPPCC report) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jj/2015-03-06/8420.html>

10. China Embassy in Bangkok

10.1. 第二十七届“世佛联”大会新闻发布会在曼谷举行 (The press conference of the 27th "World Buddha Federation" Conference was held in Bangkok)

http://th.china-embassy.gov.cn/ywzn/whjy/10a/201404/t20140428_1449086.html

11. The Chinese Central Government

11.1. 宗教局通报关于处理涉及佛教寺庙等管理问题情况 (The Religious Affairs

Bureau reported on the handling of management issues involving Buddhist temples)

http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2014-04/17/content_2661813.htm

12. United Front Work Department

1.1. 发挥藏传佛教文化在“一带一路”建设中的积极作用 (Give full play to the

positive role of Tibetan Buddhist culture in the construction of the Belt and Road

Initiative) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/jl/2017-06-12/12902.html>

1.2. 如何充分发挥信教群众和信教群众在促进经济社会发展中的积极作用? (How

to give full play to the positive role of religious people and religious believers in

promoting economic and social development?)

13. The National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference

13.1. 全国人民代表大会授权发布和中国政协：李克强谈民族宗教事务和华侨

事务 (Authorized release of the National People's Congress and Chinese

People's Political Consultative Conference: Li Keqiang talks about ethnic and religious affairs and overseas Chinese affairs)

14. Xinhua Silk Road

- 14.1. Belt and Road Cooperation Research Center opened in Bangkok.
<https://en.imsilkroad.com/p/124129.html>

15. Xinhua

- 15.1. 习近平：巩固发展最广泛的爱国统一战线 (Xi Jinping: Consolidate and develop the most extensive patriotic united front)
http://www.xinhuanet.com//politics/2015-05/20/c_1115351358.html
- 15.2. 凝心聚力共襄盛世伟业——党的十八大以来全国宗教工作综述 (Work together to contribute to the great cause of the prosperous world - a summary of the national religious work since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China) <https://www.chinabuddhism.com.cn/xw/fj/2016-04-22/10483.html>
- 15.3. Buddhist Association of China hosts meeting on cooperation in Lancang-Mekong region. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-05/19/c_139954378.htm

16. China Association for the Promotion of Peaceful Reunification

- 16.1. 法师:佛教可助创建和谐社会 (Master Zhan Ru, member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference: Buddhism can help create a harmonious society)
http://www.zhongguotongcuhui.org.cn/lslt/201303/t20130305_3859782.html