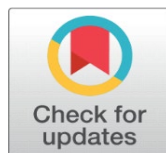


INDIA AND THAILAND RELATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the dynamic and multifaceted relationship between India and Thailand, emphasizing their strategic, historical, cultural, and economic ties from 2000 to 2022. It explores key areas such as historical interactions, people-to-people contact, and the pivotal role of the Indian Diaspora in Thailand. The study highlights shared cultural heritage, collaborative regional frameworks like ASEAN and BIMSTEC, and connectivity initiatives including the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway. Analyzing the influence of soft power and cultural diplomacy, the research underscores how both nations serve as crucial partners in linking South and Southeast Asia, fostering regional stability, development, and mutual understanding.

Keywords: India–Thailand, Strategic Partnership, Cultural Diplomacy, Soft Power, Diaspora, Free Trade Agreement (FTA), ASEAN, BIMSTEC, Mekong–Ganga Cooperation (MGC), Connectivity Initiatives, Defense Cooperation, Maritime Security, Act East Policy, Education Cooperation, Cultural Exchange Program (CEP), Festival, Tourism Cooperation.



1. INTRODUCTION

India and Thailand have mutual respect, similar historical links, and an ongoing commitment to regional peace and development and longstanding political and cultural cooperation. They have been strengthening their ties through diplomatic engagement, economic collaboration, and cultural exchanges. The partnership has evolved into a multifaceted relationship, reflecting the growing importance of strategic cooperation in the region. Despite India's lack of commercial or economic potential, diplomatic relations between the two countries have become more regular since India gained independence in 1947 ("Brief on India-Thailand's Relations" 2021).¹

The end of the Cold War and the economic growth in East Asia during the 1970s has led to a dramatic expansion of the Indo-Thai relationship since 2001.

This period has been marked by an increase in high-level visits, agreements, and financial contacts between the two nations. Thailand and India share a deep cultural connection rooted in Buddhism, with Hindu influences visible in Thai dance, theatre, architecture, arts, and literature. Buddhism flourished under King Ashoka of the Mauryan Empire, and

¹ "Brief on India-Thailand's Relations." 2021. Ministry of External Affairs Government of India. Accessed October 10, 2023

over the centuries, Thai religious customs, artwork, music, and architecture have evolved while drawing inspiration from Indian narratives and art forms ("Empire of Faith: Into the Realm of the Buddha & the Mauryas" 2021).²

To foster cultural interaction, Thailand and India have established bilateral agreements, with Thai Buddhist temples often featuring idols of Lord Ganesha and Buddha. Diplomatic relations between India and Thailand were initiated in the early 2000s, as both countries recognized the potential of leveraging their historical ties, grounded in cultural and religious exchanges, to strengthen their partnership.

India and Thailand have been fostering economic cooperation since the initiation of diplomatic visits in 2003. The signing of the Framework Agreement for establishing a Free Trade Area in 2003 laid the foundation for increased economic engagement, fostering trade and investment between the two countries. The India-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement, which Thailand joined, significantly boosted bilateral trade, reaching new heights each year. Key sectors of economic interaction include information technology, pharmaceuticals, automotive, and tourism ("ASEAN-India Free Trade Area" 2003).³

The Thailand Board of Investment's outreach efforts in India have facilitated increased investments and fostered a favorable environment for business exchanges. Strategically, India and Thailand have worked together to address regional security challenges and ensure stability in Southeast Asia. Defense cooperation has seen significant advancements through joint military exercises, training programs, and intelligence sharing. Both nations have actively participated in forums like the ASEAN Regional Forum and the East Asia Summit, emphasizing their commitment to a rules-based international order. Cultural and people-to-people exchanges have also played a vital role in binding the ties between India and Thailand.

2. CULTURAL RELATIONS

The relationship between India and Thailand, which has deep roots in centuries of cultural exchange, can be examined through various theoretical frameworks in the field of International Relations, particularly those centered on "soft power", "cultural diplomacy", "Intercultural communication", and "Dialogue among Civilizations".

The concept of "soft power," introduced by Joseph Nye in his 1990 book, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, redefines global influence. Unlike "hard power," which relies on military and economic force, soft power utilizes attraction and persuasion, emphasizing a nation's cultural appeal, values, and positive policies. This approach is essential in modern diplomacy, allowing countries to achieve their goals without coercion.

By fostering genuine connections and a favorable image, nations can inspire and unite, creating lasting bonds that facilitate meaningful influence (Joseph Nye 1990).⁴ According to his concept highlights a nation's ability to influence others through attraction rather than coercion, utilizing resources such as culture, political values, and foreign policy. So, the concept of soft power showcases a nation's ability to influence through attraction rather than coercion, relying on culture, political values, and foreign policy. In Thailand, India's cultural impact is evident through the historical spread of Buddhism and Hinduism, which have shaped art, architecture, language, and societal norms.

While the term "cultural diplomacy" was introduced to the U.S. State Department in 1959 by Robert H. Thayer, Special Assistant to the Secretary of State, during a speech at the University of Maine. Though the concept predates this moment, Thayer's remarks are seen as crucial in establishing its significance in international relations.

Later, Milton Cummings offered a description that is frequently quoted, emphasising the importance of cultural interchange in fostering international understanding. According to Milton Cumming Cultural diplomacy is a powerful tool that promotes the exchange of ideas, information, art, and various cultural elements between nations and their peoples. By fostering mutual understanding and appreciation, it helps build bridges across cultures and strengthens international relationships (Center for Arts and Culture 2004, p2).⁵ So, Cultural diplomacy, a key component of soft power, enhances bilateral relations by fostering cultural exchanges and understanding. India highlights its rich cultural heritage through Yoga, Bollywood, and vibrant festivals like Diwali and Holi, strengthening ties with Southeast Asia. Similarly, Thailand

² "Empire of Faith: Into the Realm of the Buddha & the Mauryas." 2021. Sarmaya. June 14, 2021. Accessed May 5, 2022.

³ "ASEAN – India Free Trade Area." 2003. Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Accessed Mar 5, 2022.

⁴ Joseph Nye. 1990. *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power: Concept of Soft Power*.

⁵ Center for Arts and Culture. 2004. *Cultural Diplomacy: Recommendations & Research*. Washington DC.

promotes its exquisite cuisine via initiatives like Thai Select, alongside its engaging festivals and tourism campaigns aimed at India. This exchange deepens connections and enriches both nations in our interconnected world.

Edward T. Hall's study, which was first presented in his 1959 book *The Silent Language*, forms the foundation for the idea of "intercultural communication" in international relations. (Edward T. Hall 1959).⁶This phrase describes the sharing of knowledge and concepts between people or groups with different cultural origins. It's crucial for negotiating cultural differences and encouraging civil communication. By recognizing and adapting to various cultural norms and communication styles, we can build relationships and achieve common goals in our interconnected world. Intercultural communication theory in international relations examines how exchanges between diverse cultures impact global interactions, diplomacy, and political understanding. This theory goes beyond language proficiency, considering cultural values, beliefs, communication styles, and power dynamics. Culture significantly influences how nations and individuals connect.

Effective communication requires a commitment to understanding each other through verbal and nonverbal cues and cultural context. In essence, intercultural communication theory is crucial for understanding the relationship between culture and communication in international relations, emphasizing that cultural competence is vital for positive global interactions and a more harmonious world. The need of understanding and respecting cultural differences is highlighted by this idea of intercultural communication, which explores the relationship between communication and culture. It seeks to promote reciprocal adaptation rather than just absorption.

The historical interactions between India and Thailand exemplify cultural fusion, where both nations selectively adopt aspects of each other's traditions while preserving their unique identities. The spread of Buddhism from India to Thailand and the evolution of Thai Buddhism showcase this process, as does the lasting influence of Sanskrit and Pali on the Thai language.

The concept of "Dialogue among Civilizations," introduced by Hans Kochler in 1970s, he articulated this vision in a letter to UNESCO and organized a key international conference on intercultural dialogue in 1974 and this civilizational dialogue emphasizes communication and interaction between diverse cultures, aiming to foster mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation (Hans Kochler 2003, p315-320)⁷. It highlights the importance of recognizing our shared values while embracing cultural diversity. The goal is to build bridges and address global challenges collaboratively, turning conflict into peaceful coexistence.

The reduction of internal conflict and the encouragement of international cooperation in the modern world depend heavily on civilizational dialogue. By encouraging meaningful exchange, it creates pathways to unity and harmony, essential for navigating an uncertain global landscape (I.V. Zeleneva 2018, p1-8).⁸This framework emphasizes the value of historical and shared civilizational connections for enhancing international relations. The peaceful nature of India-Thailand interactions has laid a strong foundation for modern cooperation. The enduring popularity of the Ramayana in Thailand, adapted as the Ramakien, highlights this shared heritage and the deep bonds that unite these two cultures.

India and Thailand have maintained a strong political and cultural relationship focusing on economic, strategic, and cultural cooperation. They are committed to enhancing their partnership and supporting global stability and prosperity. At the ninth India-Thailand joint commission conference in August 2022, the seventy-five year of diplomatic ties was commemorated. Nonetheless, there are still issues to be resolved, such as controlling Myanmar's borders, advancing connectivity initiatives, and negotiating the geopolitical competition between the US and China in the Indo-Pacific area. Both countries aim to promote cultural exchange and cooperation, highlighting their harmonious blend of Buddhism and Brahmanism. In 2022, a logo design contest was organized to commemorate the 75th year of their diplomatic ties ("Thailand & India Unveil Commemorative Logo to Mark 75th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations" 2022).⁹

The cultural relationship between Thailand and India has evolved significantly since 2000 due to globalization, economic interdependence, and mutual appreciation for each other's cultural heritage. The relationship has evolved

⁶Edward T. Hall. 1959. *The Silent Language: Intercultural Communication*.

⁷Hans Kochler. 2003. "Philosophical Basis, Current State and Prospects: The Dialogue of Civilizations." *Asia Europe Journal* 01 (03).

⁸I.V. Zeleneva. 2018. "Dialogue of Civilization New Model of World Politics: The European Proceedings of Social & Behavioural Sciences." *Future Academy*.

⁹"Thailand & India Unveil Commemorative Logo to Mark 75th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations." 2022. The Thai Embassy New Delhi. Accessed March 1, 2023

through religion, art, cuisine, and modern diplomacy. The first trade and cultural exchanges between India and Thailand occurred around the sixth century BC.

The concept of soft power, introduced by political scientist Joseph Nye, in the 1980s, referring to a country's ability to influence others without coercion, by projecting its values, ideals, and culture across borders ("What Is Soft Power" 2023).¹⁰

In contrast to coercion or military force, this strategy places an emphasis on attraction and influence through cultural links, diplomacy, and mutual understanding. Both countries have utilized cultural diplomacy to enhance their global standing and foster bilateral ties. By promoting knowledge and respect of neighbouring cultures via cultural events and exchange initiatives, cultural diplomacy fortifies diplomatic connections. The Thai language, Phasa Thai, was developed by King Ramkhamhaeng using ancient Indian alphabets. The languages of Khmer, Malay, English, and China significantly influenced Thai, highlighting the importance of cultural diplomacy in today's globalized world. In 1977, Thailand and India forged a significant Cultural Agreement, paving the way for vibrant cultural exchanges between the two nations. The Cultural Exchange Program (CEP) aims to enhance mutual understanding and appreciation through the sharing of traditions, arts, and cultural practices ("Cultural Exchange Program" 2024).¹¹

As the two countries commemorate their seventy-five year of their diplomatic relations, the Thailand-India Cultural Exchange Initiative has greatly improved their relationship. The program, which aims to increase commercial, investment, and tourist relations, has achieved significant milestones over the years. The agreement signed on December 22, 2022, focuses on performing arts for ten days; a testament to the program's enduring success.

Both countries cooperate in contemporary and modern art exchange through exhibitions, seminars, and conferences. They also collaborate in international workshops and artist residencies, promoting mutual aid of archaeologists seeking experience in excavations, research, and preservation of archaeological artifacts.

Both India and Thailand are collaborating on a week-long exchange of expertise in records management, digitalization, preservation, archives administration, and conservation. Officials and Thai students have access to professional training facilities from the National Archives of India and Thailand. Both countries exchange publications, reading materials, library visits, staff members, joint exhibitions, information and skills in various disciplines, including museum staff, curators, and researchers. Activities include reciprocal exchange of literary delegations, translation of diverse works, and developing engaging educational programs for children.

In 2022, India and Thailand commemorated their 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations, fostering ties and ensuring effective communication about strategic plans and initiatives. They have officially launched a Cultural Exchange Program designed to bridge differences and establish innovative arrangements for exhibitions in Hindi, English, and Thai, with a commitment to maintaining the highest level of authenticity for each text. This initiative underscores the importance of cultural exchange as a cornerstone of India-Thailand relations, highlighting the profound historical connections that bind the two nations (Thai Embassy New Delhi).¹²

Thailand is mostly a Buddhist nation, with approximately ninety-five percent of its population practicing the Theravada Buddhism. It has had a big impact on Thai culture because it arrived in Asia from India long before the Christian period. This intricate web of customs, festivals, and rituals is the result of both external influences particularly from China and India and indigenous beliefs. The coexistence of Buddhism and Hinduism in Thailand is profound; while Buddhism is the official religion, there is notable tolerance for other faiths. Many Hindu practices have become deeply integrated into Thai culture, often making it difficult to distinguish between the two religions. This blending allows individuals to embrace both faiths, as many rituals and beliefs share commonalities. This study seeks to explore these similarities, highlighting the connections between Thai and Hindu festivals and illustrating the rich interplay of these spiritual traditions in Thailand (Ruchi Agarwal 2011, 79-80).¹³

Religion remains a significant aspect of cultural relations between Thailand and India, with Buddhism being a significant influence. The revival of interest in Buddhism, especially in the wake of global spiritual movements, has led

¹⁰ "What Is Soft Power." 2023. Council on Foreign Relations Educations. Accessed June 20, 2023

¹¹ "Cultural Exchange Program." 2024. Government of India Press Information Bureau. PIB. Accessed May 4, 2024.

¹² "Thailand & India Unveil Commemorative Logo to Mark 75th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations." 2022. The Thai Embassy New Delhi. Accessed March 1, 2023

¹³ Ruchi Agarwal. 2011. "Thai and Indian cultural linkage: the religious festivities." *Silpakorn University Journal of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts* 11 (2).

to increased exchanges between the two nations. The Indian government has promoted Buddhism as a means of cultural diplomacy through initiatives like the “Buddhist Heritage” program, fostering tourism and cultural exchange. High-profile visits by Thai Buddhist leaders to India have reinforced these ties, highlighting a shared spiritual heritage. Art and literature have also played a significant role in cultural exchange between Thailand and India. The Indian art scene has increasingly embraced Thai influences, while Thai art has drawn inspiration from Indian traditions, particularly in sculpture and architecture. Additionally, there has been an exchange of ideas in literature, with Thai authors studying Indian themes and Indian writers depicting Thai surroundings and characters. The translation of literary works between the two languages has further facilitated the exchange. Thai has a tonal language with different meanings and 44 characters in an alphabet that has changed over 700 years. It is influenced by ancient Indian languages, Sanskrit and Pali, and is still widely used in Thailand. Thai people believe names should have significance, similar to the Indian practice of giving children meaningful names. Many Thai names are inferred with Indian names, including Aaduliya, Sacchai, Shaanti, and Nirramith (“The Captivating Stories behind Thai Names” n.d.)¹⁴.

Traditional Thai literature is filled with themes of religion, aristocracy, and royal life. One of its best works, the Ramakien, is an engrossing rendition of the Hindu epic Ramayana that skilfully captures the depth of Thai storytelling and culture. This masterpiece not only reflects the spiritual and cultural values of Thai society but also showcases the rich tapestries of characters and narratives that have captivated audiences for generations. Thai literature is primarily influenced by Hindu and Buddhist culture, which shaped the indigenous folk tales; this, resulted in writing that was heavily impacted by matters of religion. In the very beginnings of its writing, the Thai used Khmer letters to interpret Pali writings before developing their own script. This resourceful approach reflects their commitment to preserving and understanding important texts during that time. The Buddhist texts, particularly L. Ghosh and K. Jayadat, had a significant influence on Thai literature, making the earliest works predominantly religious in style and inspiration (Lipi Ghosh, n.d., 152).¹⁵

Even royal princesses who learn Pali and Sanskrit literature continue practicing Sanskrit in Thailand’s Royal Tribunals, which are ruled by Brahmins. India’s impact increased in the 1970s and 1980s when the Indian government created a Sanskrit Study Centre at a university and deployed Pali and Sanskrit specialists to Thai universities. The Government of India produced six original versions in both Thai and Hindi after translating a number of significant Pali and Sanskrit works into Thai in order to overcome cultural differences; this initiative fostered cultural appreciation and strengthened ties between the nations’.

India’s Himalayan region is a popular travel destination, and the film and entertainment industry in Thailand has fostered cultural cooperation. Indian films, particularly Bollywood, are popular in Thailand, while Thai films are appreciated in India. Key areas of cooperation include film, television, web series, and animation production and distribution. Indian filmmakers and their viewers are drawn to Thailand’s breathtaking scenery, beaches, and rich cultural legacy.

Film festivals like the International Film Festival of India and the Bangkok International Film Festival serve as vibrant platforms that celebrate cinematic talent from both countries. These esteemed events showcase exceptional films and attract Indian studios, fostering collaboration that enriches the film industry. Thai content is gaining market share in India, and music projects between Thai and Indian musicians have fused traditional aspects of both cultures.

The deep and enduring bond between India and Thailand is demonstrated by their historical and cultural connections, which extend far beyond music and movies. The Royal Thai Embassy has organized a special exhibition in New Delhi showcasing ancient Thai art, musical instruments, Khon masks, and archaeological sites from Thailand (“The Indo-Siam Connect” 2023).¹⁶ The exhibition also showcases the vibrant cultures of Thailand and Assam North East India. Photographs powerfully highlighted the intricate details and majestic beauty of Buddhist architectural landmarks, inviting viewers to experience the spiritual significance and historical depth of these remarkable sites.

¹⁴ “The Captivating Stories Behind Thai Names.” n.d. The Thailand Foundation. Accessed May 9, 2023

¹⁵ Lipi Ghosh. n.d. India-Thailand Cultural Interactions Glimpses From the Past to Present. 2017th ed. Springer.

¹⁶ “The Indo-Siam Connect: Tracing the Indian Heritage in Thai Art and Living Traditions.” 2023. Royal Thai Embassy in New Delhi.

3. ROLE OF DIASPORA

An intriguing case study for investigating Diaspora ideas is the Indian Diaspora in Thailand, which includes a variety of groups such as Sikhs, Tamil Hindus, Punjabi Hindus, and Muslims (including Dawoodi Bohras and Tamil Muslims). Rather than viewing it as a monolithic entity, it's crucial to adopt a heterogeneous perspective that acknowledges the internal diversity and fluid nature of their identities and experiences. Various theoretical perspectives are used to analyze this complex phenomenon like "Acculturation", "Transnationalism", "Push and Pull factor of migration"

According to John W. Berry's *Acculturation and Cultural Adaptation* is a key work in the field of cross-cultural psychology, exploring how individuals and groups adapt when they come into contact with different cultures. This online access book likely discusses Berry's model of acculturation, which identifies four main strategies: Integration, Assimilation, Separation, and Marginalization (Culture and Psychology: Berry's Model of Acculturation 2020, Chapter 13).¹⁷

This model is used to understand how Indian Diaspora in Thailand navigate cultural change and adapt to new environments. Many Indian individuals and communities in Thailand exemplify integration by preserving their Indian heritage while actively participating in Thai society. This is evident in the blending of languages, religious practices, and cultural expressions. Historical examples, particularly among the Siamese Brahmins who wholeheartedly embraced Thai culture and Buddhism, powerfully illustrate the profound level of assimilation that took place. Although less common, there are instances of maintaining distinct cultural boundaries or encountering social exclusion, particularly among certain groups or individuals within the Diaspora.

The concept of "Transnationalism" introduced by Joseph Nye and Robert Keohane in the 1970s (Robert O'Keohane and Joseph S Nye Jr 1971, p 9-29).¹⁸ They defined, transnational contacts are those that take place outside of state borders and are not governed by the government. This idea highlights the growing interconnectedness and interaction among individuals, groups, and institutions across national borders, moving beyond the traditional focus on nation-states and their relationships.

An effective example of transnationalism is the Indian Diaspora in Thailand, where people and groups skillfully preserve close links to both their home country and their new one. Many individuals skillfully cultivate hybrid identities that seamlessly blend elements of Indian and Thai cultures. This fusion is evident in language, religious practices such as the incorporation of Buddha statues within Hindu temples and vibrant social interactions. Organizations like the Thai-Bharat Cultural Lodge, the India-Thai Chamber of Commerce, and religious institutions such as Hindu temples and Sikh gurudwaras are vital in cultivating cultural connections and fortifying community bonds. These networks not only instill a profound sense of belonging but also catalyze a dynamic exchange of traditions and values, greatly enriching our shared experiences. Their influence is essential in creating a vibrant, interconnected community that thrives on diversity and mutual respect.

The concept of push and pull factors in migration was introduced by Everett S Lee in the 1960s through his "Push-Pull Theory" (Everett S Lee 1966, 3: p47-57).¹⁹ This theory effectively categorizes the dynamics of migration into two distinct groups: push factors that compel individuals to leave their homeland and pull factors that draw them towards new and promising destinations. Push factors reflect the negative conditions in one's country that compel migration, while pull factors highlight the positive attributes of a destination that offer new opportunities.

All of these elements work together to explain the nuanced reasons people migrate and seek out better lives. The migration of Indians to Thailand, both historically and in contemporary times, has largely been motivated by the desire for better economic prospects. This is particularly evident in sectors such as trade, textiles, gems, and skilled labor areas like information technology.

Indian immigrants were drawn to Thailand in large part by King Rama-V's liberal trade policies and the British colonisation of India. These factors contributed to the initial wave of migration. Established Indian communities and religious networks in Thailand serve as important pull factors. They not only attract new migrants but also help them integrate into Thai society.

¹⁷Culture and Psychology: Berry's Model of Acculturation. 2020. Maricopa Community College.

¹⁸Robert O. Keohane, and Joseph S. Nye Jr., eds. 1971. *Transnational Relations and World Politics*.

¹⁹Everett S. Lee. 1966. *A Theory of Migration*. Vol. 3.

Although the traditional Indian caste system may not be as overtly replicated in some Diasporic contexts, elements of social stratification can still be observed within the Indian community in Thailand and in their interactions with Thai society. The Indian Diaspora in Thailand plays a significant role in constructing multi-ethnic and multi-religious identities while balancing their Indian heritage with Thai and local identities. This often involves adopting terms like “Khaek,” which carry various connotations, as well as blending different religious practices. The process of identity formation entails negotiating with the norms of the host country and sometimes subtly resisting categorization or marginalization, particularly concerning the notion of “Thainess.”

Darwin’s theory of evolution explains how species change over time due to natural selection, where the fittest individuals survive and pass on their traits to the next generation (“Darwin and His Theory of Evolution” 2009, 1-5).²⁰ According to his theory of evolution, as presented in *On the Origin of Species* (1859), proposes that all life forms share a common ancestry and have evolved over time through a process of natural selection. While primarily focused on biological evolution, some aspects of Darwin’s theory can be applied metaphorically to understand the dynamic relationship between nations, including India and Thailand. While Darwin’s theory was developed to explain biological evolution, applying its principles metaphorically can provide a framework for understanding the complex dynamics of international relations. The relationship between India and Thailand, characterized by shared heritage, adaptation, and a mix of competition and cooperation, exemplifies the ongoing “evolution” of their bilateral partnership. The establishment of an Indian Cultural Center in Bangkok in 2009 underscores the continued importance of cultural exchange in shaping this relationship.

Evolutionary Political Economy, as proposed by Veblen, views economic systems as dynamic, evolving, and influenced by institutions, technology, and human behavior. It emphasizes cumulative change between business and industry and the role of social norms in shaping economic outcomes, arguing for an evolutionary science in economics (“The Origins of Evolutionary Economics : Thorstein Veblen in Retropect” 2014, 9).²¹

The Diaspora also contributes to the evolution of the evolutionary political economy (EPE) by facilitating knowledge transfer and investment opportunities, impacting Thailand’s economic landscape. The Indian Diaspora plays a crucial role in shaping international relations between India and Thailand through economic growth, technological advancement, and social dynamics. The Indian IT sector exemplifies how Diaspora connections can facilitate economic growth and governance. The Indian Diaspora in Thailand aligns national production structures with international market demands, enhancing bilateral relations and bolstering technological capabilities.

In line with the principles of Darwin’s theory of evolution and Evolutionary Political Economy, it is noteworthy that the Diaspora plays a significant role in advancing the evolution of this field by facilitating the transfer of knowledge and creating investment opportunities, the Diaspora positively influences Thailand’s economic landscape. The rise of digital communication platforms has transformed social interactions, affecting diplomatic relations. The Diaspora also promotes gender equality and economic opportunities in Thailand, contributing to sustainable development and strengthening ties between the two nations. The Indian Diaspora in Thailand, estimated at approximately 250,000, also plays a significant role in cultural exchange and cultural diplomacy with many living here for generations. The Indian community in Thailand, although modest in size, is essential for gaining deeper insights into the global Indian diaspora.

A significant number of community members hold Thai nationality and play vital roles across diverse business sectors. In addition, many Indian professionals actively contribute to the workforce in private companies throughout the country. Notably, organizations such as the Thai Bharat Cultural Lodge, founded in 1930, are instrumental in fostering rich cultural exchanges between India and Thailand, highlighting the invaluable contributions of both communities to the social and economic landscape (Ruchi Agarwal, 2018, p. 133).²²

The book *Politics of Migrations: Indian Emigration in a Globalized World* by A. Didar Singh and S. IrudayaRajan identifies three phases of Indian migration: ancient, colonial, and modern. During the ancient period, migration was mainly intended to promote trade, conquer and spread the teaching of Buddha. During that era, Indian traders embarked on daring sea voyages to Southeast Asia, driven by the pursuit of wealth and the promise of adventure. Their journeys

²⁰ “Darwin and His Theory of Evolution.” 2009. Pew Research Center.

²¹ “The Origins of Evolutionary Economics : Thorstein Veblen in Retropect.” 2014. Luiss Guido Carli.

²² Ruchi Agarwal. (2018). Breaking the links? A case study of the Indian diaspora in Thailand. *Journal of Global Analysis*, 8(2).

were fueled by ambition and the desire for success in vibrant new markets (Didar Singh and IrudayaRajan, n.d., chap 2).²³

The migration of traders, priests, and merchants from India to Thailand significantly influenced the Thai way of life, leading to the development of Indian customs, Sanskrit language, arts, and way of life. This cultural influence is evident in Thai festivals honouring gods, harvests, and auspicious days. Both countries participate in and celebrate each other's cultural festivals and activities, such as Thai holidays like Songkran and Loy Krathong. Songkran, a national holiday in Thailand, begins a week or more before and lasts until April 16, a week of joy, festivities, and introspection. Thai people celebrate the New Year in this spirit, often exchanging "Happy New Year" or "sawatdee pi mai" greetings ("Loy Krathong- Celebrating the Cultural Link Between India and Thailand" 2023).²⁴

Songkran, affectionately known as the "Water Festival," is a vibrant celebration that embodies themes of rebirth, purification, and the dispelling of misfortune through spirited water fights. This exuberant festival sees people of all ages coming together, joyfully splashing one another as a symbol of cleansing and renewal, while sharing hopes for the promising season ahead. The rich history of Songkran is even referenced in the ancient Sanskrit drama Ratnavali, highlighting its cultural significance.

Loy Krathong festival In Thailand is a stunning celebration that beautifully parallels Diwali. This enchanting event pays homage to the revered river goddess Mae KhongKha, a powerful symbol of the sacred Ganga, weaving together themes of spirituality and gratitude in a spectacular display that captivates all who participate. The significance of this festival peaks on KartikPurnima, a day celebrated with the breathtaking illumination of hundreds of oil lamps, known as Diyas. The flickering lights serve as a powerful symbol of divine presence on Earth, crafting a captivating scene that radiates hope and spirituality. Additionally, TripurariPurnima marks the cherished conclusion of the "TulsiVivaha" celebration, reflecting the deep-rooted traditions of devotion (Ruchi Agarwal 2011, 83).²⁵

Songkran, famously known as the "Water Festival," is an exhilarating celebration in Thailand that embodies the themes of rebirth, purification, and the joyful casting away of misfortune through spirited water battles. This lively celebration is a genuinely remarkable event that not only revitalises the body but also the soul. It is a symbol of cleansing and renewal, and is rooted in the ancient Sanskrit drama Ratnavali. In Thailand, the river goddess Mae KhongKha, who symbolises the holy Ganga, is honoured during the mesmerising Loy Krathong celebration. The festival's significance is heightened on KartikPurnima, a day marked by the illumination of hundreds of oil lamps, known as Diyas. TripurariPurnima marks the end of the "TulsiVivaha" celebration, reflecting deep-rooted traditions of devotion. The Festival of Lights, or Loy Krathong, has its roots in the Sukhothai Kingdom of antiquity. This enchanting celebration is not only a vibrant showcase of Thai culture but also holds significant historical ties to the marine trade routes that interconnected ancient India and Bharatvarsha. The festival embodies the spirit of gratitude and reverence for water, making it a powerful reminder of our cultural heritage and the enduring connections between nations ("Loy Krathong Celebrating the Cultural Link between India and Thailand" 2023).²⁶

The Loy Krathong and the Bali Yatra in the state of Odisha connect lights and drifting boats and this two are commonalities both the Nations' and this relationship between Thailand and India is reflected in these aspects. Throughout history, water has been an important part of Thai culture, acting as a source of sustenance and transportation. (Ruchi Agarwal 2011, 86).²⁷

In education system of Institutions and higher learning in both nations' collaborate in the field of research and academic. Thailand food, which has become renowned for its intense ingredients and perfect balance, draws visitors to urban India. This increased interest has led to a boom in Thai eateries and lively food festivals, attracting foodies and establishing a sumptuous dining experience that honours this remarkable culinary heritage. Additionally, Thai massage, recognized for its therapeutic benefits, has gained a following in India, further strengthening the cultural ties between the two countries.

²³Didar Singh, and IrudayaRajan. n.d. Politics of Migration: India Emigration in a Globalized World. 2016thed.

²⁴ "Loy Krathong – Celebrating the Cultural Link between India and Thailand." 2023. Indica Center for Power Studies. Accessed May 25, 2023.

²⁵Ruchi Agarwal. 2011. "Thai and Indian cultural linkage: the religious festivities." Silpakorn University Journal of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts 11 (2).

²⁶ "Loy Krathong – Celebrating the Cultural Link between India and Thailand." 2023. Indica Center for Power Studies. Accessed May 25, 2023.

²⁷Ruchi Agarwal. 2011. "Thai and Indian cultural linkage: the religious festivities." Silpakorn University Journal of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts 11 (2).

4. DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

The political relationship between India and Thailand can be understood through various theoretical frameworks that emphasize the interplay of historical ties, shared interests, and strategic considerations.

According to Nicholas Greenwood Onuf of Constructivism in International Relations in 1989 posits that our understanding of international dynamics is socially constructed. Key elements, such as state identities and interests, are shaped by shared ideas, norms, and social interactions rather than solely by material factors like power or economic capabilities. Constructivists argue that state behavior is influenced by how states perceive themselves and others, with meanings assigned to events and relationships significantly impacting global affairs (Nicholas Greenwood Onuf 1989)²⁸ and Soft Power introduced by political scientist Joseph Nye, in the 1980s, referring to a country's ability to influence others without coercion, by projecting its values, ideals, and culture across borders ("What Is Soft Power" 2023).²⁹ In order to define the bilateral ties between Thailand and India, this idea is essential by highlighting the importance of cultural ties, diplomacy, and mutual understanding; this approach effectively fosters attraction and influence, thereby strengthening the bond between the two nations. So, Constructivism and the concept of soft power create a compelling theoretical framework that underscores the evolving relationship between India and Thailand the lasting influence of Indian culture, particularly Buddhism, in Thailand society creates a natural affinity and shared heritage, fostering mutual understanding and trust. This shared cultural background facilitates cultural exchanges and people-to-people connections, promoting a positive perception of one another. The spread of Buddhism from India to Thailand, along with the presence of Hindu elements in Thai art and literature, illustrates the deep cultural roots of the relationship. Additionally, India's soft power, derived from its culture, values, and public diplomacy, contributes to strengthening the ties between the two nations.

According to Robert Keohane neoliberal institutionalism is a key figure in the development of in international relations, particularly through his influential 1984 book, *After Hegemony*. This theory posits that international institutions are vital for fostering cooperation among states, even without a dominant power. By acknowledging the anarchic nature of the international system, neoliberal institutionalism highlights how states can achieve mutual benefits through collaboration and the creation of frameworks to tackle shared challenges (Robert Keohane 1984)³⁰ and Regional Cooperation. Both India and Thailand actively participate in regional organizations such as ASEAN, BIMSTEC, MGC, and the East Asia Summit. These institutions provide platforms for dialogue, cooperation, and the promotion of shared interests, including connectivity, economic growth, and regional stability. Further enhances institutional mechanisms and cooperation in areas like defense, cyber security, and trade. Joint initiatives such as the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway aim to improve connectivity and boost regional trade and tourism.

An important contributor to the growth of political realism in international affairs is Hans Morgenthau. His influential work, *Politics among Nations* in 1948, asserts that state behavior is primarily driven by the pursuit of national interests, defined in terms of power, and that international politics is a continual struggle for dominance. Morgenthau's realist framework rests on six key principles. He argues that politics is governed by objective laws derived from human nature and emphasizes that while moral principles are universal, they must be adapted to fit specific circumstances. This perspective provides a powerful lens for understanding the pragmatic nature of international relations (Hans Morgenthau 1948, *Political Realism*)³¹ and the concept of "balance of power" in international relations has evolved since its origins in ancient Greece. While no single individual coined the term, influential thinkers like Thucydides and David Hume shaped its understanding. The formalization of this principle is often attributed to Hugo Grotius and his contemporaries in the 17th century.

In essence, the balance of power refers to a state of equilibrium where no nation or alliance holds enough power to dominate others. This distribution of power prevents any single entity from becoming too strong and threatening global stability, ultimately fostering cooperation and safeguarding national sovereignty. Realism and strategic balancing are critical in the India-Thailand relationship like Thailand's "Act West" policy favourable remark to India's "Act East" policy, reflecting a mutual desire for deeper engagement and strategic alignment both the two nations. This relationship is often

²⁸ Nicholas Greenwood Onuf. 1989. *International Relations Theory: Constructivism*.

²⁹ "What Is Soft Power." 2023. Council on Foreign Relations Educations. Accessed June 20, 2023

³⁰ Robert Keohane. 1984. *Theory of Neoliberal Institutionalism in International Relations: After Hegemony*.

³¹ Hans Morgenthau. 1948. *Politics among Nations: Political Realism*.

viewed through the lens of balancing rising powers and addressing shared concerns, such as maritime security and counterterrorism. Enhanced defense cooperation and intelligence sharing are crucial for addressing both traditional and non-traditional security threats in the region. Collaborative efforts in regional forums like ASEAN, BIMSTEC, and IORA also seek to promote regional stability and counter the growing influence of China.

The concept of economic interdependence in international relations is prominently associated with Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye (Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye 1970).³² In the 1970s, they introduced the theory of “complex interdependence,” which highlights the deep interconnectedness and mutual reliance among states, especially through economic ties. While earlier thinkers addressed interdependence, Keohane and Nye focused on how these intricate relationships shape state power and the roles of non-state actors. Economic interdependence indicates that nations rely on one another for prosperity, with each country’s economy influenced by trade, investment, and interactions. This dynamic ensures that a nation’s economic health is linked to the policies and actions of others, revealing a global economy characterized by reciprocal influences where cooperation is vital for success.

Development cooperation has been a key aspect of Cold War geopolitics, as discussed in the book, *Origins, Evolution and Future of Global Development Cooperation: The Role of the Development Assistance Committee*. Editor Gerardo Bracho states that official development cooperation began after World War II. The book chronicles the 60-year history of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), which evolved from a Cold War hub for development cooperation to a leader in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Bracho highlights the challenges posed by the new Cold War, framing modern development cooperation as a transition from an “Imperialist” model to a North-South dynamic, where wealthier nations support poorer ones. The focus remains on shared goals like poverty reduction, education, healthcare, and infrastructure development (Gerardo Bracho and Richard Carey 2021, p11).³³

The principles of Economic Interdependence and Development Cooperation highlight that the growing trade and investment between India and Thailand have significantly strengthened their political relations. By fostering economic ties, both nations are not only enhancing their commercial collaboration but also deepening mutual political trust and partnership. Thailand is a key trading partner for India within ASEAN, and both countries aim to diversify their economies and enhance regional economic integration. Initiatives trade and investment are being pursued to facilitate, thereby deepening economic ties. Collaboration in areas such as renewable energy, digital technology, and healthcare holds significant potential for mutual benefit and sustainable economic growth.

These theoretical frameworks underscore the complex and multi-dimensional nature of the India-Thailand political relationship, demonstrating how historical linkages, shared cultural values, regional cooperation, strategic considerations, and economic interests collectively shape their diplomatic ties. The relationship between India and Thailand, two culturally rich and historically intertwined nations in Asia, has experienced significant evolution since the dawn of the new millennium. This Study explores the multifaceted political, economic, and cultural developments from 2000 to 2022, highlighting the growing partnership that reflects shared interests and mutual aspirations. To appreciate the recent developments in India-Thailand relations, it is essential to consider their historical ties. Both nations share a rich cultural heritage that dates back centuries, with influences evident in religion, art, and trade. The ancient maritime routes facilitated exchanges that laid the groundwork for a deep-rooted connection.

Between 2000 and 2022, India and Thailand have made numerous visits, with notable visits by Prime Ministers Thaksin Shinawatra, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and Manmohan Singh. Institutional frameworks like the India-Thailand Joint Commission and Foreign Office Consultations have been used to enhance bilateral engagement. The India-Thailand Strategic Partnership was established in 2004 to enhance cooperation in security, trade, and cultural exchange. The two nations have collaborated on multilateral platforms, including ASEAN and the East Asia Summit, and have addressed security concerns, particularly regional terrorism and the South China Sea maritime security. Joint military exercises and intelligence-sharing initiatives have enhanced trust and cooperation. The sixth consultations between the two countries marked the 30th anniversary of dialogue relations between India and ASEAN (Ministry of External Affairs Government of India 2022).³⁴ Both the nations’ Maritime Boundaries Prioritize unrestricted navigation via Malacca Straits. Naval collaboration between Delhi and Bangkok has increased since the first marine drill in the Andaman Sea in 2019, including

³²Robert Keohane, and Joseph Nye. 1970. *Theory of Complex Interdependence: Economic Interdependence*.

³³Gerardo Bracho, and Richard Carey. 2021. *Origins, Evolution and Future of Global Development Cooperation: The Role of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC)*.

³⁴Ministry of External Affairs Government of India. 2022. “Celebration of the 30th Anniversary of the ASEAN-India Dialogue Relations.” Accessed September 8, 2022.

Singapore. “Both countries contribute to world’s largest naval effort, RIMPAC.” India and Thailand have been working on naval security in the Indo-Pacific region since 2005, with joint training programs, intelligence sharing, and anti-piracy measures. Post-2014, India focused on maritime diplomacy, with Thailand being a crucial partner in maintaining freedom of navigation and communication. Both countries have cooperated in counterterrorism, cyber security, and intelligence sharing. India’s defense cooperation agreement in 2012 and the Maitree military exercise in 2007 improved security relations in both the nations. Thailand faces a difficult balance between China and the US, and analysts urge Bangkok to maintain a balance in foreign policy. India and Thailand have seen significant economic growth over the past two decades, with bilateral trade increasing from \$2 billion in 2000 to over \$10 billion by 2022.

The Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) liberalize trade and investment, enhancing economic ties so, India is a key trading partner with significant pharmaceuticals, textiles, and machinery exports, while Thailand trades automobiles, electronics, and agricultural products to India. The two nations have explored collaboration in information technology, renewable energy, and tourism sectors. Investments have also strengthened economic ties, with Indian companies investing in Thailand’s manufacturing and services sectors, while Thai investments focus on infrastructure and agriculture. The India-Thailand Business Council has facilitated dialogue between business communities, fostering greater economic collaboration. In 2005, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed to strengthen bilateral relations in education, recognizing its importance in human resources, economy, and society.

India and Thailand have been working together to promote language learning, academic exchanges, and cultural exchange. They have established the International College to enhance academic collaboration and deepen understanding of Indian culture, history, and society. Thailand’s Tourism Authority (TAT) expanded its reach by establishing offices in India, drawing in over one hundred thousand Thai travelers. This strategic move has led to increased connectivity between the two nations and showcased Thailand’s vibrant culture and attractions (“Tourism Authority of Thailand (India) Kickstarts: Thailand Build Back Better Together Campaign” 2021).³⁵ Tourism generates income, fosters relationships, boosts the local economy, and benefits associated businesses. Thailand’s focus on providing affordable and quality services has contributed to its success. The two countries are also collaborating to improve regional connectivity through programs like the ASEAN Highway Network, India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, and BTILS. Bilateral trade between Thailand and India reached US\$15 billion in 2021-2022, ranking Thailand as India’s top trading partner in South Asia and its fourth-largest trading partner in Southeast Asia.

However, the delicate political environment complicates the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway project’s early operational. The COVID-19 pandemic halted high-level visits between India and Thailand but also sparked new collaborations, such as health diplomacy. In 2022, both countries resumed in-person diplomatic engagements, focusing on economic ties, regional connectivity, and defense collaboration.

India is providing Thailand with 71 scholarships for the 2022-2023 academic years, 1,000 places under the Doctoral Fellowship in India for ASEAN (DIA) Program, and ten scholarships in science and technology to Thai scientists and researchers (“Cooperation in the Field of Education Between India and Thailand” 2024).³⁶

5. CONCLUSION

The cultural relations between India and Thailand are deeply rooted in centuries of shared history, religious exchange, and mutual appreciation, forming a powerful foundation for modern diplomacy. Through frameworks such as soft power, cultural diplomacy, intercultural communication, and dialogue among civilizations, the two nations have strengthened their ties beyond political and economic interests. The spread of Buddhism from India to Thailand, the adaptation of Hindu epics like the Ramayana into the Ramakien, and the influence of Sanskrit and Pali on the Thai language and literature exemplify this enduring cultural interplay. Initiatives like the Cultural Exchange Program, joint film and art collaborations, and bilateral agreements in heritage preservation highlight a deliberate effort to preserve and promote this relationship in contemporary contexts. Shared values and traditions have enabled both countries to build trust, enhance cooperation, and promote peace and understanding in the Indo-Pacific region. The popularity of Indian culture in Thailand, and vice versa, underscores the significance of cultural diplomacy in strengthening bilateral relations. As India and Thailand celebrated 75 years of diplomatic relations in 2022, their cultural bond continues to

³⁵“Tourism Authority of Thailand (India) Kickstarts: Thailand Build Back Better Together Campaign.” 2021. Travel Trade Journal, September.

³⁶“Cooperation in the Field of Education Between India and Thailand.” 2024. Embassy of India Bangkok Thailand. Accessed June 10, 2024.

evolve, embracing both tradition and modernity, making it a cornerstone of their partnership and a model for peaceful intercultural engagement in the globalized world.

The India-Thailand relationship is a dynamic and evolving partnership rooted in deep historical, cultural, economic, and strategic ties. The Indian Diaspora in Thailand plays a pivotal role in fostering this connection by acting as a bridge between the two nations, contributing to cultural diplomacy, economic development, and social integration. Theoretical frameworks such as Acculturation, Transnationalism, and Evolutionary Political Economy provide insights into how diaspora communities navigate identity and influence bilateral relations. Meanwhile, diplomatic relations are shaped by Constructivism, Realism, and Neoliberal Institutionalism, emphasizing shared values, strategic balancing, and institutional cooperation.

Cultural festivals like Songkran and Loy Krathong underscore the shared spiritual heritage and continued cultural exchange, while collaborations in education, technology, tourism, and trade reflect deepening economic interdependence. Joint initiatives in regional connectivity, defense cooperation, and multilateral engagement through ASEAN and BIMSTEC further reinforce this robust partnership. Despite challenges, such as the complex political environment in Myanmar, both nations have demonstrated resilience and a shared vision for regional stability and prosperity. The India-Thailand relationship exemplifies a successful model of regional cooperation and people-to-people ties, continually adapting to global changes while preserving its historical foundations. As the partnership matures, it holds immense potential for further growth in the Indo-Pacific era.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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