

Beyond Bilateral: The Constitutive Dimensions of Strategic Partnership Between Japan and Thailand

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Abstract

This article discusses bilateral state cooperation that was developed, with the agreement of both states, into a more comprehensive and long-term partnership known as a Strategic Partnership. The dynamics in the bilateral relationship between these states then become an attraction to analyze the Japan-Thailand strategic partnership further. This article focuses on the function of the strategic partnership, the roles of the two actors, and viewing it in a constitutive dimension. This article aims to analyze the background and functions of forming strategic partnerships for partner states and examine the differences between strategic partnerships and bilateral relations of the two states in general. The authors use qualitative and library research method to collect data and conduct the analysis. The relationship and interactions between Japan and Thailand are analyzed on three levels: international, bilateral, and individual, using the concept of strategic partnership as a social interaction between global actors and the role-playing that occurs. By observing from the perspective of both actors, the authors argue that the strategic partnership agreed upon by Japan and Thailand acts as an agency that facilitates self-conception to maintain their position, status, and role in the international system.

Keywords: Japan, social interaction, strategic partnership, Thailand.

Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas kerjasama bilateral negara yang dikembangkan, dengan kesepakatan kedua negara, menjadi kemitraan yang lebih komprehensif dan berjangka panjang, yang dikenal dengan Kemitraan Strategis. Dinamika dalam hubungan bilateral kedua negara ini kemudian menjadi daya tarik untuk menganalisis lebih lanjut kemitraan strategis Jepang-Thailand. Fokus dalam artikel ini adalah pada fungsi kemitraan strategis, peran kedua aktor, dan melihatnya dalam dimensi konstitutif. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis latar belakang dan fungsi pembentukan kemitraan strategis bagi negara mitra, serta menelaah perbedaan antara kemitraan strategis dan hubungan bilateral dua negara pada umumnya. Penulis menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif dan kepustakaan untuk mengumpulkan data dan melakukan analisis. Hubungan dan interaksi antara Jepang dan Thailand dianalisis pada tiga tingkat: internasional, bilateral dan individual, dengan menggunakan konsep kemitraan strategis sebagai interaksi sosial antara aktor global dan permainan peran yang terjadi. Dengan mengamati dari sudut pandang kedua aktor, penulis berpendapat bahwa kemitraan strategis yang disepakati oleh Jepang dan Thailand bertindak sebagai agensi yang memfasilitasi konsepsi diri untuk mempertahankan posisi, status dan peran mereka dalam sistem internasional.

Kata kunci: interaksi sosial, Jepang, kemitraan strategis, Thailand.

INTRODUCTION

In 2012, Japan and Thailand established a strategic partnership. The two Prime Ministers of each country at the time, Mr. Yoshihiko Noda and Mrs. Yingluck Shinawatra, issued a joint statement of significance to advance and strengthen friendship-based bilateral relations and committed to cooperate in various fields within the bilateral, regional, and international scope (MOFA of Japan, 2012). This joint statement also has a long-term goal of enhancing prosperity and peace in Southeast Asia. Despite various ups and downs in the relationship, especially after the military takeover that happened in Thailand in 2014 (Nirmala, 2015), the partnership continued to strengthen over the next few years (Tivayanond, 2012; Sriratanaban, Khusakul, & Sindhvananda, 2015; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kingdom of Thailand, 2017; Khusakul, 2019). At this time, in a context where Japan and Thailand had agreed on several strategic partnerships with other Asia-Pacific partner states, the strategic partnership agreed upon between the two was not one of the most comprehensive (Envall & Hall, 2016; Trinidad, 2018). The comprehensive part is the common goal of enhancing their role in the global context and their status in the international system. As a result, the question of how strategic partnerships are maintained and what functions they perform in the larger environment arises.

Japan and Thailand have been good partners since before the 20th century. The relationship between them is not just predicated on democratic principles. However, numerous connections support the relationship, such as a significant historical background that both Thailand and Japan are well acquainted with (Hartley, 2017). However, the latest

events in Thailand have been happening rapidly. Thailand has been deeply divided since the 2006 coup against Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra (Thepgumpanat & Tanakasempipat, 2017). Before the country fully recovered, Thailand's military intervened in 2014 to depose Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra. This brought political instability that caused the economy to slump and weaken (Yueh, 2014).

On the other hand, Japan experienced a change of head of government. Previously, Mr. Yoshihiko Noda was still in charge of the Japanese government when the strategic partnership agreement was announced. Later, he was replaced by Mr. Shinzo Abe, who became the prime minister of Japan in late 2012.

This article focuses on the case of the Japan-Thailand relationship from 2012, when the agreement was first announced, to the latest development in 2022. This paper is divided into two sections. First, it starts with the definition of a strategic relationship. Second, the strategic partnership between Japan and Thailand is examined from three perspectives. This section investigates the distinction of concepts in norms and points of view of Japan and Thailand to assess the goal of their interaction beyond the bilateral relationship.

Conceptual Framework

Strategic partnership is a relatively new concept in the field of international relations. The concept of strategic partnership was initially developed in organizational studies and business and management studies. However, the phrase "strategic partnership" first appeared in international politics in the 1990s (Blanco, 2015). Added Michalski (2019), Tyushka, and Czechowska (2019), mention that the

first strategic partnerships developed after the end of the cold war between the late 1980s and early 1990s. This phrase became widely used in international relations to describe the collaboration between players in global politics (Blanco, 2015). In addition, the concept of “strategic partnership” is broad and varied. Due to its nature, it encompasses a variety of discursive conceptual frameworks, cultural implications, and political activities from around the world (Tyushka & Czechowska, 2019).

In their article, Tyushka and Czechowska (2019) explain several concepts of strategic partnerships according to several experts. Furthermore, it can be concluded that these concepts have something in common, namely that the long-term relationship includes common goals and interests. Other scholars stated that a strategic partnership is a bilateral state relationship that combines flexibility and deep collaboration and shares shared aims and beliefs for long-term cooperation (Czechowska, 2013). While according to Luis Blanco (2015), strategic partnerships are defined as collaboration between parties with shared interests to achieve high-priority objectives.

Michalski and Pan (2017) provide another definition and notion of strategic partnership. They separate strategic partnerships into two linguistically distinct components: “partnership” and “strategic”. The phrase “partnership” is a physical aspect of the term bilateral, indicating a closer engagement or relationship between two actors with shared objective goals in a friendly environment. The phrase “strategic” refers to higher objectives or goals. Thus, Strategic Partnerships are unique relationships that serve as the foundation

of coalitions or alliances that are long-lasting and mutually beneficial and focused on issues of a higher order (Michalski & Pan, 2017).

The constitutive aspect of strategic partnerships is connected to the conception of a multipolar world order. It includes efforts to control interstate relations in an anarchic international system. Therefore privileged bilateral relationships with essential actors can help maintain stability (Michalski & Pan, 2017). These partnerships can be between old friends or foes, strong or weak governments, and international organizations. The essential component of strategic partnership is the “strategic” dimension in the form of regional or global relevance or economic and security objectives (Michalski & Pan, 2017).

In the book by Michalski and Pan (2017), they define the strategic partnership based on its function from three different perspectives. First, from an individual perspective, the function of strategic partnerships concerns cooperation's impact on the actors' identity and their self-conception (Michalski & Pan, 2017). At this level, the focus is on the impact on the identity and self-conception of the actors involved. Second, each actor tends to adapt their conception to the supposition of the other actor rather than integrating the identity at a basic level, for instance, norms and values (Michalski & Pan, 2017). Third, it is also possible for an actor to play a diverse role in many partnerships in which they participate. This condition happens due to the adjustments made by the actor, where the adoption of foundational elements such as norms and values will lead to fundamental changes in the actor's identity. At the same time, the adaptation of the application of roles will be a shift in

strategic behavior that affects the implementation of the actor's foreign policy (Michalski & Pan, 2017). In addition, actors who partner with each other and have similar worldviews tend to take actions that will strengthen their respective positions and status in the international system in their partnership interactions.

In contrast, the opposite tends to be competitive (Michalski & Pan, 2017). In addition, the self-conception and identity of the actor provide instructions on how they should think, analyze and act in response to their environment. Furthermore, state identity is shaped by social interactions within the country and other countries, which can result in good or bad relationships (Busbarat, 2012). Therefore, at this level, strategic partnerships also function as a means of fulfilling self-confidence and increasing the actors' status.

According to the bilateral perspective, the involvement of the actors in strategic partnerships is centered on persuasion and joint practice rather than on deep internationalization and convergence of identities (Michalski & Pan, 2017). Consequently, the degree of correlation between the norms and worldviews of each actor and their respective positions in the international system might range from competitive to conciliatory, determining the nature of the interaction. This condition indicates that at this level, interactions among actors are evaluated primarily on the advantages of organized social contacts with other international actors instead by calculations of financial gains. Moreover, the actors use rhetorical persuasion to achieve these advantages of social contact (Michalski & Pan, 2017).

The form and degree of socialization among strategic partners will determine

the result of participation in the partnerships, which are open-ended and subject to change. The results can be opportunistic, where the connection is constructed on an untrue foundation so that the socialization impact would be less broad, or they can be superficial without a clear goal. While if the relationship is based on shared interests and values, the engagement may be more extensive and lead to a convergence of norms, worldviews, and identities (Michalski & Pan, 2017).

Meanwhile, from an international perspective, strategic partnerships function as a means of making social contacts between countries or institutions through diplomacy and socialization, becoming a network of bilateral relations that complement multilateral relations in the international system (Michalski & Pan, 2017). Strategic partnerships that are seen in this perspective, which give interstate interaction structure, primarily concentrating on the geopolitical sphere, can enhance multilateral participation in strategic issues, enhance global governance, and transform the international system into a network of bilateralism (Tyushka & Czechowska, 2019).

In addition, several conditions are used to assess bilateral relationships as strategic partnerships. Czechowska (2013) asserts that a good strategic partnership model offers the following three requirements. **First**, the relationship between the partners should increase the intensity and define privileges above what the two countries are used to be. This argument should be particularly evident in the volume of high-level meetings. **Second**, there must be a sophisticated system of mutual interaction at interstate and people-to-people levels. For example,

the establishment of a joint body structure under the head of state's authority to make decisions on partnerships or other bilateral ventures. Another example is the improvement of means for the continuation of bilateral relations, such as the organization of military units, collaboration between local units, cooperation on social and cultural issues, and educational exchanges. **The third** step is the initiative of the partners to build stronger ties based on loyalty and trust, which foster goodwill and a positive atmosphere between the two parties.

Following the described description of the formal form of a strategic partnership, it also has several fundamental features that set it apart from other forms of partnership. **First**, there is a “partner” character. It is not offering a broad indication of the position of equal partners. However, it may be determined by the respect for each other’s viewpoints and interests and demonstrated by the regular convening of high-level discussions between leaders of state or governments (Czechowska, 2013). **Second**, the state has a unified strategic goal. Czechowska (2013) argues that states that collaborate have an equal number of goals, whether distinct but compatible, distinct but does not differentiate, or it is fully incongruent. **Third**, carrying priorities of each party in an equal or comparable manner. Both partners must have faith in one another, pool their resources, and work together to achieve their shared strategic objectives. A statement establishing a strategic partnership between the parties might be evidence of this. The statement must include a “special name” to indicate the strategic bilateral partnership (Czechowska, 2013). The existence of sincere and continuous cooperation

between the parties is a crucial requirement for a relationship to become a strategic partnership. Lastly, to demonstrate the efficacy of a strategic partnership, it is also required to sign the agreement that will put the statement into action, augment them in the primary areas of partnership, and closely coordinate specific activities.

The concept of strategic partnership by Michalski and Pan (2017) will be used to analyze the function of strategic partnership for Japan and Thailand as an actor in the international system. This theory explains the constitutive dimension of a strategic partnership which addresses the performance of strategic partnerships by examining the use and function of strategic partnerships for the actors involved.

Research Methods

This research uses qualitative and library research methods to analyze the strategic partnership between Japan and Thailand. First, the data are collected from the documents, mainly in the form of official statements, speeches, and policy papers, containing all the essential strategy documents published by Japan and Thailand on their bilateral relationship, as well as relevant literature on strategic partnership agreements. This research also explains the main requirements for a partnership between countries to be called a strategic partnership introduced by Czechowska (2013). Then, the functions of strategic partnerships are examined using the three levels of analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Japan and Thailand Strategic Partnership Assessment

In the partner relationship between Japan and Thailand, the Imperial and Royal Families have maintained good relations for more than 100 years, which has been the foundation for their historical relationship and friendship (Zeng, 2017). To intensify the ties and implement the strategic partnership agreement, Japan and Thailand send their respective prime ministers or foreign ministers on official state visits to each other, including members of the imperial and royal families (MOFA of Japan, 2022). In addition, both countries prime ministers or foreign ministers organized summit meetings that the two governments hold once or twice a year (MOFA of Japan, 2021), following the joint statement on strategic partnership issued by Prime Ministers Yingluck and Prime Minister Noda in 2012. They emphasized the importance of enhancing communication to advance cooperation between Japan and Thailand and for the security and development of the region (MOFA of Japan, 2012).

Some of the goals outlined in the agreement established by Japan and Thailand are shared by both. Looking back at these objectives, it is clear that both sides share the same intentions and standards, which led to the establishment of this agreement. According to Czechowska (2013), to develop strategic partnership, there needs to be at least one objective that both parties acknowledge and execute equally or similarly. In this regard, both leaders have reaffirmed their intention to build the strategic partnership further to serve and strengthen peace and prosperity in Southeast Asia (MOFA of Japan, 2012). The statements is an official declaration from Japan’s and Thailand’s prime minister, and can be seen as an equalization of the strategic goals of both sides. Japan and Thailand also think that they share the same basic principles, which allows them to contribute to the growth of the Asia-Pacific region (MOFA of Japan, 2012). Thus, a joint agreement was formed under the name “Japan-Thailand Joint Statement on the Strategic Partnership based on the Enduring Bonds of Friendship: Fostering Confidence beyond the Disasters”.

Before 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declaration of Friendship and Trade between Japan and Thailand. • Established diplomatic relations in 1887. • Japan increased investment and Japanese firm's subsidiaries in Thailand in 1976. • Establish economic partnership agreement 2006.
2012 – 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Japan-Thailand Strategic Partnership 2012. • Thailand military coup 2014. • Japan – Thailand annual Summit Meeting. • Mekong-Japan Exchange Year 2019.
2020 – 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID-19 Crisis Response Emergency Support. • Donation of COVID-19 vaccine to Thailand. • Five-Year Joint Action Plan on Japan-Thailand Strategic Economic Partnership. • Comprehensive Strategic Partnership 2022.

Source: (MOFA of Japan, 2022)

Table 1
Japan-Thailand Partnership Relations Development

As stated in their agreement, Japan and Thailand have pledged to work together over the long term and multi-dimensional to realize a strategic partnership (MOFA of Japan, 2012). Furthermore, the two states categorize their collaboration's range into bilateral, regional, and global concerns. Likewise, the Japan-Thailand Economic Partnership Agreement (JTEPA) was also included. The agreement is used as an operational form of their declaration to facilitate the implementation and operation and strengthen their cooperation when addressing bilateral economic concerns (MOFA of Japan, 2012). Furthermore, the two states also decided to conduct the Japan-Thailand Political Partnership Consultations and Politico-Military and Military-Military Dialogue work together to enhance national and regional security (MOFA of Japan, 2012). Additionally, related to the Plan of Action of the ASEAN-Japan Summit and Bali Declaration, Japan and Thailand have reaffirmed their commitment to advancing regional growth and integration.

However, their relations deteriorated due to the military takeover in 2014. As a result, the Japanese government stopped high-level diplomatic exchanges, and the country's foreign investment fell by 37% (Nirmala, 2015). Fortunately, this circumstance did not occur for a very long period. Since Thailand is Japan's most significant foreign investment destination in Southeast Asia, the Japanese corporations asked the governments to maintain strong ties with the Thai government (Nirmala, 2015).

During the pandemic, Japan helped Thailand through knowledge sharing in building a new supply chain and healthcare system (WHO, 2020; JICA,

2020). The Japanese government also helped Thailand in post-Covid-19 recovery by providing medical equipment and vaccine and making plans to transfer Japanese technology to strengthen the health system in Thailand. On 17 November 2022, Japan and Thailand recently agreed to elevate their strategic partnership to be more comprehensive. The two states have recognized the progress of their multi-dimensional relations and agreed to deepen and expand the strategic partnership under the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (Cabinet Public Affairs, 2022). Furthermore, as a form of strategic partnership development, the two prime ministers signed a new agreement of The Five-Year Joint Action Plan. The agreement will serve as the guideline for their economic relations in 2022-2026.

The Function of Strategic Partnership: Three-Level Analysis

Strategic partnerships agreed upon by the parties concerned can affect their status and position in the international system. This is related to the function of strategic partnerships as a place for social interaction and for building and strengthening the image and identity of the actor in the international system (Michalski & Pan, 2017). This function can be seen through three levels: individual, bilateral, and international.

Individual Level

The historical event of the downfall of the Khmer Empire led to the rise of Thailand to stand out and led to the growth of Thailand's political authority in mainland Southeast Asia. The situation psychologically shaped the opinion of the Thai people that Thailand is a significant player and should continue the

leadership role in the Southeast Asia region (Busbarat, 2014). In the late 1980s, Thailand experienced economic progress. It generated a sense of self-confidence that resulted in the regional agenda dominating the foreign policy of Thailand and adopting the motto of “transform the battlefield to a marketplace” (Busbarat, 2014; Chambers & Bunyavejchewin, 2019). Before the Asian Financial Crisis, Thailand was focused on showcasing its leadership abilities as the force that would make it the center of regional dynamics (Busbarat, 2012). Furthermore, despite the subsequent domestic political issues, Thailand’s perception of its identity has not changed. Thailand views itself as a middle-power country competing with other large countries (Hoang, 2016).

In Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra administration (2011-2014), one of the efforts to gain the trust of partner countries, ensure Thailand’s economic stability is the strategic partnership and make it a feature of foreign policy in Thailand. In order to enhance Thai confidence and develop capacity and immunity, it was stated in the Policy Statement of the Council of Ministers that Thailand would intensify its strategic relationships and alliances with countries, groups of countries, and international organizations that are prominent in international affairs (Tivayanond, 2012).

After the military coup in 2014, Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-o-cha and his foreign ministries sought recognition in politics from the strategic partners, either within or outside the Southeast Asian region (Chachavalpongpun, 2018). Therefore, Thailand has maintained positive ties and developed relationships with its key partner nations to preserve

and improve Thailand's security, prosperity, and sustainability. It can be seen from the yearly reports of the Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha government (Sriratanaban, Khusakul, & Sindhvananda, 2015; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kingdom of Thailand, 2017; Khusakul, 2019).

Tekasuk (2019) claims that Thailand uses the strategy of balancing power, which has always been the foundation of Thai foreign policy practice, to ensure its continuation amid fierce power rivalry and influence in Southeast Asia, particularly towards China. In order to gain status as a middle power and lessen the harmful effects of the external environment, Thailand must preserve its strategic relationship (Hoang, 2016). The initiative Japan took to play a more active role in regional security encourages the aim of Thailand to have and balance different security among partner states (Sato, 2007). Even though political conditions and the external environment have changed, Thailand has not fundamentally transformed its national identity within the evolving international order. Thailand may have previously aspired to regional hegemony, but in many situations, it also requires sincere guarantees from powerful nations (Hoang, 2016). Most experts who have studied the foreign policy of Thailand agree that it follows a “bending with the wind” strategy (Hoang, 2016). It illustrates the adaptability of Thailand to its environment by how it modifies its policies to fit changing circumstances. From this perspective, Thailand realizes the need for a balancing act between those power relationships to take advantage of the competition and protect its interests as the center of the region at the same time.

According to Amy Freedman (2021), when measured by capabilities, Thailand is included as the upper-middle power of other Southeast Asian countries. However, unlike similarly ranked countries in Europe, Thailand is still not a significant leader in global institutions. Thailand can also not exert more power and influence in Southeast Asia, especially ASEAN. It happened partly due to unstable domestic politics hindering Thailand's leadership (Freedman, 2021). Therefore, Thailand continues to strive to strengthen its economy and assist neighboring countries to gain recognition from other countries for its status as a country with enough power and influence in the international system.

Seeing this level's function of strategic partnership, Japan has also developed an identity. Japan also pursued it towards several other countries in Southeast Asia, including Thailand. It may also be observed from the attempts taken by former Japanese prime ministers like Yoshida and Fukuda, who sought to transform Japan's reputation from that of a colonizer and economic animal into a good ally that played a significant role for the countries in Southeast Asia (Dalpino, 2017; Hwee, 2006). This is because the fact of many Southeast Asian still had doubts and suspicion about Japan as a consequence of its involvement in World War II. Even so, the program was thought to effectively restore a positive reputation abroad (Harun, 2015).

The Yoshida and Fukuda doctrines had considerable influence on the core of the policy of the Prime Ministers in the following years until 2012 when Prime Minister Abe took over the office. During his administration, Prime Minister Abe aimed for Japan to be seen as an

independent country, an equivalent partner of the U.S., and an attempt to maintain its position as supreme power and leader in Asia (Hughes, 2015). This is because Japan is seen as a self-centered country that mirrors Western countries but is also hesitant to engage in Western conceptions, so it is said to be experiencing an identity crisis (Harun, 2015). With that in mind, Prime Minister Abe's whole proposed revolutionary agenda aims to remove internal political and diplomatic restrictions that limit the essential national character of Japan and its viability as a player in the international system.

Because of this, it can be said that the strategic partnership is one of the methods for reviving the public perception of Japan and keeping its position and influence, particularly in Southeast Asia. This has been a part of ongoing efforts to make Japan normal. Moreover, to remove its reputation as a China-follower and regain its influence, Japan is also making proactive movements toward countries in the Southeast Asia region. Therefore, the partnership between Japan and Thailand saw to be evolved into a tool for achieving power recognition. Likewise, it became the region's center and maintained its status as a middle power. Hence, it can be observed at the individual level that the relationship allows Japan and Thailand to affirm their international identities and acknowledge their respective positions in the international system.

Bilateral Level

Strategic partnerships are viewed bilaterally as role-playing platforms where participants may establish their global identities and elevate their position and reputation as global players

(Michalski & Pan, 2017). Besides the long-standing ties between the royal families of Japan and Thailand, both states also have a good relationship that spans politics, culture, and, most importantly, the economy. Unlike all other nations in the Asia Pacific, Thailand was never colonized, has no particular relations to any Western nations, and was neither invaded nor occupied by Japanese armed troops during the Second World War. Since most of the population is Buddhist, Thailand has closer cultural links with Japan than other ASEAN nations (Lehmann, 1987). In addition, Japan is one of Thailand's traditional trade partners and investors, contributing to the country's development through official development assistance (ODA) and technical cooperation. Meanwhile, Thailand plays a crucial role as the hub for Japanese business production and the hub of the industries such as the automobile and electronics industries, southeast Asia (Embassy of Japan, 2020).

When examining this partnership at the bilateral level, it is clear that it provides a framework in which both parties may acknowledge the identities of one another and where foreign policy can be debated as part of a bilateral diplomatic exchange. Thailand and Japan have similar expectations for the outcomes of their bilateral cooperation. This speaks to the focus on the claims made in their agreement and its goal. Both states have standard norms and values, one of which is a democracy, and consider the strategic partnership as the most crucial cornerstone for pushing constructive responsibilities and role of Japan and Thailand in Southeast Asia (Sriratanaban, Khusakul, & Sindhvananda, 2015) However, following

the military coup in 2014, Thailand has not entirely accepted democracy as the government principal, and Japan continues to promote and help Thailand in achieving national reconciliation in order to return the democracy in Thailand (Japan-Thailand Summit Meeting, 2014; Japan-Thailand Summit Meeting, 2015; Japan-Thailand Summit Meeting, 2018).

According to Michalski and Pan (2017), strategic partnerships are based on opposing or parallel points of view and promote dynamic bilateral dialogue between the partners. Moreover, it can become more potent when both parties enact environmental shaping and normative implementation. For Japan and Thailand, engagements on a bilateral basis have generated role-playing in which one side attempts to convince the other to embrace the same worldview and principles. However, the conceptual distance between the two is not too vast, which could bring competitive role-play where one party expects and forces the other party into the other party's point of view that is not part of the other party's identity. Therefore, it might be claimed that Japan and Thailand both employ rhetorical persuasion or persuasion with communication in their conversations about strategic relationships. For example, when it came to convincing Thailand to accept a normative concept of democracy, which was not initially an objective of Thai foreign policy, Japan was initially more active. Furthermore, Thailand has taken the initiative by expressing obvious expectations of Japan by holding the long-awaited election in 2019 and restoring democracy.

Thus, despite some differences, conflicts, and disagreements on other matters, Thailand and Japan have created

systems that enable them to maintain their partnership. Japan and Thailand have built communication channels and transformed their interaction into diplomatic forums for resolving such disputes through their strategic partnership.

International Level

Strategic partnerships were portrayed as venues for social engagement on an international level. Besides, the roles are more likely to improve state participation that can extend beyond the intended structure of bilateral contacts to include more significant areas of multilateral engagement (Michalski & Pan, 2017; Tyushka & Czechowska, 2019). Grevi (2016) argues that the objective of a successful strategic partnership is to forge bilateral ties which are advantageous and conducive to more effective multilateral cooperation.

The strategic partnership of Thailand, first established under the rule of Prime Minister Yingluck, initially aimed to revive and advance Thailand's economy (Policy Statement of the Council of Ministers, 2011). Afterward, under Prime Minister Prayut's administration, it served as a tool for supporting the domestic politics of Thailand. In addition, strategic partnerships were viewed as a venue for diplomatic engagement where Thailand seeks support for global engagement principles related to the national standards (Sriratanaban, Khusakul, & Sindhvananda, 2015). Japan, on the other hand, has a long-term strategic engagement with Southeast Asian nations, including Thailand, to improve its reputation and gain influence in the region.

Japan and Thailand committed to deepening collaboration to construct the ASEAN Community in 2015 following the Bali Declaration and Plan of Action of the Japan-ASEAN Summit in 2011, as stated in their strategic partnership agreement (Michalski & Pan, 2017). In order to increase ASEAN connectivity, Japan helped build the East-West Economic Corridor (EWEC) and Southern Economic Corridor (SEC). Moreover, Thailand and Japan worked together to develop the Mekong area to support the efforts to fight poverty and advance their economies. Japan's contribution to the region is built on years of established ties, and it has naturally made investments and engaged in two-way trade with Southeast Asian countries. Additionally, through the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and bilateral official development aid (ODA) to the Mekong sub-region, Japan has vigorously fostered cooperation in the region or integration procedures that aimed at narrowing the gap in development and fostering stability in the mainland of Southeast Asia (Lauridsen, 2018). While also beneficial to Thailand, this partnership advances the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS). Through this project, Thailand's standing as a sub-regional leader providing assistance and support to the other nation in Southeast Asia was indirectly strengthened (Chambers & Bunyavejchewin, 2019). The strategy was launched in reaction to China's growing influence, partly to promote trade in Southeast Asia. (Chambers & Bunyavejchewin, 2019).

The programs launched by Thailand through ACMECS and Japan through ODA initially operated separately. Japan has traditionally supported countries in the

Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) through JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency), which offers grants, loans, and technical cooperation assistance. The amount of ODA provided to GMS countries in 2012 represented 41% of the total provided to countries in the East and Southeast Asia region (Selvarajah, 2014). In addition, Japan actively promotes Mekong countries as trading partners and foreign direct investment (FDI) destinations. As a result, Mekong countries received Japanese FDI of up to US\$6.71 billion in 2014, making Japan the largest investor in the region (Bi, 2017). Then, in 2015, trade between Japan and Mekong countries reached US\$81.4 billion (Bi, 2017). Meanwhile, through increased trade, investment, industry, and agricultural cooperation, ACMECS seeks to aid the development of Thailand's neighbors. ACMECS also prioritizes improving human resources for its member countries and enhancing transportation connections to promote trade and tourism in the Southeast Asian region.

Meanwhile, these goals are somewhat eclipsed by initiatives from other countries, such as the Japan Mekong Cooperation (JMC), which pledged in 2007 to provide more than US\$110 billion in aid to GMS countries over the next ten years (Chambers & Bunyavejchewin, 2019). However, these initiatives were not developed to complement each other. As a result, in 2018, Japan established the Thailand-Plus-One system, where Japanese businesses in Thailand serve as headquarters and mother factories while producing other materials in countries bordering Thailand (Nakabayashi, 2018). Furthermore, due to the announcement

from Prime Minister Abe that Japan would explore becoming a development partner while providing support to guarantee that ACMECS operations become established, this method allows Japan to complement the assistance Thailand offers to ACMECS member countries (Chambers & Bunyavejchewin, 2019).

As Japan needs Thailand to move up the value chain and generate demand for high-quality goods and services, this Thailand Plus One system has strengthened Thailand and benefited Japan. Consequently, the sharing of labor and capital within the Thailand Plus One framework can help further equalize the Mekong countries' economies. Moreover, Mekong sub-regional cooperation between Japan and Thailand needs further growth even though it has had several positive effects in the region (Krittasudthaheewa, Navy, Tinh, & Voladet, 2019). The 2019 Mekong-Japan Summit Meeting joint declaration, which calls for fostering cooperation and putting the 2018 Tokyo Strategy for sustainable development in the Mekong region into practice, was accepted by all parties (The 11th Mekong-Japan Summit Meeting, 2019).

A key component of Japan's and Thailand's long-term diplomatic goals is the strategic partnership, allowing them to participate and be recognized in the global system. As a result, from an international standpoint, Japan and Thailand's partnership serves as a platform to guarantee that the global order recognizes their position and allows them to fulfill their respective responsibilities as players in the international system, particularly in Southeast Asia. Thailand sees this partnership as an arena for diplomatic

engagement that, from the standpoint of bilateral relations with third countries, can promote its worldview and global engagement to expand Thailand's dominance in Southeast Asia. This occurs because Thailand achieves its goal of becoming a regional hub and also becoming the headquarters for Japanese enterprises due to collaboration with Japan. This connection can be viewed as a sort of defense to maintain Japan's influence in Southeast Asia and counter China's rising power. Japan does this by continuing to be the region's largest donor and investor, particularly in the GMS. However, this collaboration is motivated by the logical business of Japanese companies to make logistical transportation and shipping easier for them (Lauridsen, 2018). Hence, Japan and Thailand are facilitated by the partnership they built to prospect their self-conception as global actors and how they fit into the international system, particularly in Southeast Asia.

CONCLUSION

This article shows how Japan and Thailand have arrived at a definition of a strategic partnership that is long-lasting and significant, long-term that, is still developing, produces benefits for both parties, and is focused on a variety of issues, including the advancement of the Southeast Asian region. Additionally, this strategic partnership has successfully served as a vehicle for Japan and Thailand to better understand themselves as global actors and their place in the international system on all three levels.

A strategic partnership had grown at the individual level, allowing Japan and

Thailand to affirm their shared global identities and acknowledge their respective roles in the global order. For Japan, the strategic partnership helps maintain its position and influence in Southeast Asia and recover its reputation. On the other hand, Thailand utilizes this to build its authority, establish itself as the hub of the Southeast Asia region, and keep its status as a middle power. From this perspective of bilateral, this strategic partnership has gradually shown a deeper pattern of socialization due to the incorporation of democratic values. Lastly, at the international level, this strategic relationship serves as a platform to strengthen the relationship between Japan and Thailand with third parties, where they have worked together to advance the development of the Mekong sub-region and the goals for ASEAN connectivity.

The interaction modes of Japan and Thailand interact in their relationship illustrate the connection between role positions and foreign policy activity. Their conduct in the strategic partnership may be attributed directly to the role-play and their efforts to hold up their roles despite shifting internal and external circumstances. Furthermore, shifting circumstances affect Japan and Thailand's capacity to hold onto their leadership positions. However, despite their challenges in upholding their respective worldviews, Japan and Thailand refrained from pressuring one another to accept their principles and values and instead used persuasive methods and helping each other to adjust to it

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