



## OPEN ACCESS

## EDITED BY

Simant Shankar Bharti,  
VIZJA University, Poland

## REVIEWED BY

Reynaldo De Archellie,  
University of Indonesia, Indonesia  
Yew Meng Lai,  
Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia

## \*CORRESPONDENCE

Diogo Borges  
✉ [dijbs@isccte-iul.pt](mailto:dijbs@isccte-iul.pt)

RECEIVED 23 July 2025

ACCEPTED 27 October 2025

PUBLISHED 14 November 2025

## CITATION

Borges D and Costa CM (2025) Malaysian Chinese and their influence on China-Malaysia relations: a contemporary perspective. *Front. Polit. Sci.* 7:1671767. doi: 10.3389/fpos.2025.1671767

## COPYRIGHT

© 2025 Borges and Costa. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.

# Malaysian Chinese and their influence on China-Malaysia relations: a contemporary perspective

Diogo Borges<sup>1,2\*</sup> and Cátia Miriam Costa<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Centro de Estudos Internacionais, Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal, <sup>2</sup>Centro Científico e Cultural de Macau, Lisbon, Portugal

Malaysian Chinese have been an essential part of Malaysian society for centuries, playing a key economic role and being an active party in Malaysian politics. Throughout most of their existence, these groups have also managed to stay connected with China through the bamboo network, a string of connections that China has sought to revitalize in the last decades. This paper explores the impact of Malaysia-Chinese on China-Malaysia relations, demonstrating how these groups have profoundly shaped these relations. The study revolves around three essential factors governing the Malaysian Chinese and their interactions within this framework. First, we explore the internal dynamics of the relationship between Malaysian Chinese groups and their host societies, notably driven by ethnic tensions and economic development. Second, we analyze China's initiatives toward connecting with Malaysian Chinese groups, evaluating their scope and motivations. Third, we scrutinize contemporary Sino-Malaysian relations and key interaction points that Malaysian Chinese groups have highly impacted. This analysis contributes to a generally understudied relationship between Chinese ethnicity and foreign policy in Southeast Asia, whose impact has deeply marked the state's strategies and foreign policies.

## KEYWORDS

China, Malaysia, Malaysian Chinese, foreign policy, bamboo network

## Introduction

Since 2022, and the election of Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, Sino-Malaysian relations have gone through a deepening, with Anwar recurrently stating the strategic importance of having strong relations with China (Daniels, 2025). This has resulted in a record number of Memorandum of Understanding (Mou) signings and investment between both countries, and as recently as April 2025, during Xi Jinping's visit to Malaysia, a joint statement was issued explicating the desire to take these relations to new levels (Bernama, 2023a; MOFA PRC, 2025). Albeit the process of deepening relations with Malaysia has been ongoing since the 1990s, when China reapproached the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) states, utilizing ASEAN's multilateralism as the basis of this reconnection (Goh, 2018; Shambaugh, 2021). From Malaysia's side, being situated in the middle of a great power competition, its relation with China was the result of a hedging strategy, which persists as Putrajaya's main relation mechanism with China (Gerstl, 2022; Kuik, 2016).

In International Relations (IR), hedging occurs when a smaller state adopts a stability-seeking behavior, opting not to commit firmly to one dominant power bloc. Instead, the state in question seeks to develop relations *vis-à-vis* multiple powers simultaneously, aiming at diversifying risks and benefits, whilst ensuring its autonomy and optionality in a multilateralism-based strategy (Jackson, 2014; Johnston and Ross, 1999; Korolev, 2019). However, the definition of hedging is also a target of an extensive debate, with no single strict framework for the variations in hedging behavior for different states and regional realities (Ciorciari, 2019; Koga, 2018).

Regarding Southeast Asian states, studies tend to focus on China, whilst attempting to develop a suitable framework highlight the importance of taking into consideration the specific reality of ASEAN institutions and the domestic affairs of its states for the definition and development of a state's hedging strategy (Haacke, 2019; Jones and Jenne, 2022; Kuik, 2022). This latter point is particularly noticeable in studies analyzing Malaysia's relations with China, where authors converge on the importance of domestic affairs and domestic agents in the decision-making process of Malaysia's foreign policy toward China, with Putrajaya's hedging strategy appearing to be rooted in domestic issues (Kuik, 2021; Kuik and Jamil, 2025; Lai et al., 2023). In fact, going further into the aspects of hedging in Malaysia and its domestic agency, we can observe that domestic legitimation is a constant factor in defining Malaysia's relations with China. Prominent academic literature has identified that Malaysia's hedging *vis-à-vis* China is mainly determined by legitimation efforts carried out by ruling elites, where they seek to strike a balance between the economic benefits, both to Malaysia and to themselves, stemming from a relation with China and the possible risks it has on a multi-ethnic society (Kuik, 2021). This has led academics to view Malaysia's hedging toward China as dually marked by deterrence and deference, especially in the face of the rising autonomy risks stemming from China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), being a necessary approach for a small state's survival (Kuik and Lai, 2023; Lai et al., 2023). In essence, Malaysia's hedging should be observed as a multi-layered and multi-domain approach, marked by various levels of engagement, deeply influenced by the imperative to maintain domestic legitimation. In the specific case of Malaysia, domestic legitimation is determined by the elite's need to enhance their political domination in accordance with the foundations of their authority, which in this case is the careful balancing of ethnic relations, especially in economic engagements which might disproportionately favor Malaysian Chinese (Kuik, 2024). This further adds to the importance of studying factors that determine domestic agency in Malaysia, when analyzing Sino-Malaysian relations, with the Malaysian Chinese arising as one of these relevant factors.

This article examines the characteristics of domestic agency in Sino-Malaysian relations, through a focus on the role and impact of Malaysian Chinese on the aforementioned relations. Originating in 10th-century migratory movements, Malaysian Chinese have established themselves as economically dominant elites who have played crucial roles in the inception of contemporary Malaysian society, despite only representing 23% of the total population (Halim et al., 2024; Ministry of Economy Malaysia, 2023a; Yen, 2008). Malaysian Chinese have also been an active part of

the bamboo network, the informal network connecting Chinese business and groups throughout Southeast Asia, demonstrating a long record of business dealings with China (Tan et al., 2024; Tze-Ken et al., 2018).

Therefore, we deem important the study of the relationship between Malaysian Chinese and foreign policy, given the previous points. Malaysia's current adaptable hedging strategy opens the premise for the study of non-traditional views on foreign policy, such as through the lenses of ethnicity or a specific ethnic group. Concurrently, the longstanding reality of Malaysian Chinese in Malaysia, as well as of other ethnic Chinese groups in the rest of Southeast Asia, alongside their established societal role, raises the importance of studying these groups from varying perspectives. In addition, contemporary Sino-Malaysian relations are quite relevant for the current foreign policy and strategy of both countries. Studying the shared commonality of ethnicity, and how Malaysian Chinese and the bamboo network can impact these relations, offers a unique perspective for the study of contemporary IR, beyond the traditional framework of state relations.

As the next section of this study will demonstrate, we will bring together longstanding studies on the role of ethnicity and foreign policy, and studies on the unique cultural reality and *modus operandi* of ethnic Chinese and the bamboo network, to develop an effective analytical framework for this study. We aim to contribute to the field of ethnic Chinese studies by presenting a unique framework and analysis for the assessment of the impact of Malaysian Chinese groups in Sino-Malaysian relations. Our contribution further aims to advance the current knowledge of the relations of the bamboo network and China's current strategy toward Southeast Asia, spearheaded by the BRI.

As such, this study argues that Malaysian Chinese have played an influential role in Sino-Malaysian relations, by leveraging their economic power, network connections and elite status amidst Malaysian society and the wider region. It aims to answer the research question: "How did Malaysian Chinese impact contemporary Sino-Malaysian relations?". This effort will be accomplished by first developing an analytical framework for the relationship between ethnic groups and foreign policy, with the framework being adapted to cater toward the specific reality and interactions of the Malaysian Chinese. This section will be complemented with an overview of the key dynamics defining the interaction between Malaysian Chinese and Malaysian policymaking. Next, the article will analyze China's initiatives to establish direct or indirect connections with Malaysian Chinese, resorting to the bamboo network and the role of local organizations. Lastly, we scrutinize key interaction points in contemporary Sino-Malaysian relations, which have been impacted by Malaysian Chinese, with a special focus toward the BRI. As it will be demonstrated throughout this article, this study aims to fill a gap regarding the study of Malaysian Chinese and their impact on foreign policy.

Regarding methodology, this paper follows a qualitative approach, mainly based on secondary sources, such as academic works and newspapers, supported by gray literature, such as organizations data, reports, governmental dispatches and official documents. For the development of this paper, we first identify a literature gap regarding the impact of Malaysian Chinese in

Sino-Malaysian relations, followed by a focus on finding methods to approach the gap. Concerning the timeframe of the analysis, due to the paper's focus on the BRI, our main period for the analysis of contemporary relations ranges from 2013 up until the first half of 2025. Notwithstanding, the dynamics of societal relations surrounding Malaysian Chinese and of historical Sino-Malaysian relations are quite extensive and cannot be isolated from contemporary interactions. As such, in order to complement the impact in contemporary relations, data ranging from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until 2013 was also analyzed. In comparison with the main period of analysis, sources analyzed for this earlier period were less reliant on organizational data and reports, and are mostly composed of historical governmental documents, historical newspaper reports, relevant academic works. As such, the prominent role of ethnic Malaysian Chinese voluntary associations led us to select three core associations for analysis, based on their economic and cultural relevance. The Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Malaysia was chosen due to being the biggest business-related Malaysian Chinese organization; the Malaysia China Chamber of Commerce was chosen due to its major economic role in Sino-Malaysian economic mediation and relations; and the Huazong was chosen due to its longstanding role in establishing key cultural linkages between Malaysian Chinese, Malaysian society and China. This effort was followed by a collection of data from the organizations official website and a selection of relevant documents to analyze, focusing on documents displaying interactions with China or in diplomatic relations between Malaysia and China. This was followed by a content analysis, which allowed us to analyze the data in accordance with our established framework.

## Ethnicity and foreign policy: an analytical framework for Malaysian Chinese

The relationship between ethnic groups and ethnicity, and their impacts on foreign policy decision-making, has been a recurring target of study in academia. Ethnic groups are capable of shaping foreign policy in various ways, in both democratic and autocratic regimes. For instance, ethnic groups can actively influence foreign policy by lobbying or leveraging their specific capabilities in a society, or in turn, they can passively influence policies through way of ethnic tensions or established societal relations (Hosseini, 2019; Moore, 2002; Saideman, 2002). In terms of greater relevance for this article, a subset of these studies gains prominence. We can also find a varied array of literature regarding the impact of diaspora networks and transnational ethnic links in foreign policy. Ethnic groups in different states can be capable of connecting through shared cultural values or interests, developing linkages which they can rely on. The existence of this wider cultural community may lead states to try to leverage this network to either achieve a relationship with these other states or with the state where the ethnic groups originate from. Concurrently, these linkages can give a wider strength toward a group's lobbying efforts (Davis and Moore, 1997; King and Melvin, 2000).

These latter studies are quite similar to the specific type of studies surrounding ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia and the bamboo network. The bamboo network represents an informal connection network between ethnic Chinese groups in Southeast Asia and China, driven by cultural and economic impetus. The consensus for the whole of Southeast Asia, and Malaysian Chinese specifically, is that this network allows for the groups to leverage their economic dominant status to establish a wide array of connections in the region (Chiang and Cheng, 2019; Lauda, 2016; Mosbah and Kalsom, 2018; Yen, 2008). The development of strong ethnic Chinese business networks allows for a closer interaction with ASEAN institutions and with China, leading to a growth in their importance over the years (Sung, 2019; Tze-Ken et al., 2018).

Extensive literature can also be found on the methods of analyzing the actions and decision-making of ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia. Traditionally, the debate focused on two opposing viewpoint: culturalism, which defends that the main decision-making drive is traditional *han* culture, based in Confucian principles, which influences the choice of business partners and operates uniformly, independent of the society these groups inhabit; and instrumentalism which argues that culture little relevancy in the contemporary period, and that the main factor of decision making is the business opportunities that the market presents (Gomez and Benton, 2004; Redding, 1990). More contemporarily, the debate has simmered, and a consensus was agreed upon that both factors jointly shape ethnic Chinese actions and decision-making. This perspective, generally labeled as intuitionist approach, proposes that Chinese cultural aspects, such as *guanxi*, favor deals with other Chinese groups, whilst being complemented with cooperation with local power structures, their economic and business goals, and the dynamics of the market (Chan and Tong, 2014; Verver and Dahles, 2013).

Since this paper tackles the role of an ethnic group in IR, it is now important to delve into relevant literature on IR theories which focus the role of culture, identity and non-state agents on IR. The core theory regarding the latter, is the constructivist theory. Constructivism defends that the world is socially constructed, which includes factors such as identities and the interests of actors. Under constructivism, factors such as culture and identity are seen as possible variables in international relations and foreign policy, for they are also socially constructed, and have agency to navigate the structures of the IR system (Park, 2023; Pouliot, 2004; Weber, 2013). Furthermore, going beyond constructivism, prominent studies, such as the work of Lapid and Kratochwil (1995), argue in favor of the importance of taking into consideration ethnicity, identity and culture for the study of IR (Harshe, 2006; Reeves, 2004; Wiarda, 2013).

Complementing these latter viewpoints, academic literature presents several subsets of approaches focused on specific aspects of IR interactions, which go beyond state-to-state relations, and are of great relevance for this framework. Firstly, we can find studies focusing on the concept of business diplomacy, which highlight how businesses have the capability to engage with governmental entities, local communities, Non-Governmental Organizations, and even media, to advance their strategic objectives. This engagement favors the agency of businesses in greater diplomatic platforms or business connection platforms relevant for states

economic development or goals (Kesteleyn et al., 2014; Ruël, 2020; Willigen, 2020). Concurrently, relevant literature can also be found on the concept of new public diplomacy, an approach to IR that focuses on building relationships and connections with foreign publics through two-way dialogue, whilst advancing a state's strategic goals through means of soft power. Dialogue can target several agents inside of a society, such as civil groups, ethnic groups, universities, local organizations and individuals, to further promote its soft power (Manor and Huang, 2022; Pamment et al., 2024; Zhao, 2019). Finally, the inside of the broader concept of new public diplomacy, we can find the concept of people-to-people diplomacy, which proposes that interactions between individuals of different states can shape IR. For instance, through education or cultural exchanges, commonalities can be found, shaping perceptions and possibly impacting relations between states, with a consensus that China is particularly active in this approach (Grincheva, 2024; Payne, 2009; Turpeau, 1960; Wang, 2016).

The literature review undertaken allowed for a better understanding of pertinent aspects and concepts for the formulation of this paper's analytical framework. We can observe a high level of compatibility between concepts of distinct areas, which allows for the gradual creation of a framework. For instance, the last three concepts, business diplomacy, new public diplomacy and people-to-people diplomacy, do not necessarily exclude one another, and can be operationalized in synchrony, while also being compatible with the concepts of passive and active influence. Most pertinent, they overlap with approaches to the specific study of ethnic Chinese groups, such as the institutionalist approach, focusing in similar areas such as the role of business, networks, dialogue platforms, and identity in shaping decision-making. In essence, it further contributes to the argument that one single framework is not sufficient to fully explore and comprehend the entire reality of the role of Malaysian Chinese in Sino-Malaysian Relations. By defining key compatible concepts and analyzing relevant theories, it is now possible to proceed to defining our analytical framework for Malaysian Chinese.

As such, our framework for the analysis of the impact of Malaysian Chinese in foreign policy will derive from these previously established studies but adapted to the specific reality of Sino-Malaysian relations and of the connections of Malaysian Chinese with China. By this, we mean that we will take into account a set of factors when analyzing this thematic. Firstly, we will not limit ourselves to just active influencing from the Malaysian Chinese in formal state-to-state interactions between China and Malaysia. Ethnic groups have the capacity to affect foreign policy in a variety of ways and fields, and as such, we will take into consideration passive influencing, meaning influencing where these groups didn't have a direct action, but their reality affected relations and influenced through other sectors, such as economic or financial sectors. This aim will be accomplished by analyzing the evolution of ethnic societal relations in the face of Malaysia's development objectives, demonstrating how the latter became closely intertwined with the reality of Malaysian Chinese. Secondly, we will go beyond state relations and consider the possibility of influence through the use of the bamboo network, whose connectivity capabilities can have the ability to connect these groups with China, in sectors crucial for Chinese foreign policy in

ASEAN. Finally, we will consider the actions of Malaysian Chinese has guided by both Chinese cultural values and an economic impetus, further expanding the reach of what these groups might influence. The focus of the application of this framework, will mostly be on business associations and platforms, complemented with cultural elements and the role of individual agency.

## An overview of Malaysian Chinese in Malaysian politics and society

Before moving on, it is important to note that we can find a record of Malaysian Chinese having a key impact in Malaysia's internal policy-making. The pre-independence colonial period saw the rise of Malaysian Chinese as an economic dominant force in Malaysia, a fact usually attributed to their ability to organize in Chinese associations and maintain their cultural networks (Yen, 2008). As a consequence of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the influence of Malaysian Chinese in local decision-making started to grow, notably with the association of Malaysian Chinese to the Pangkor Treaty of 1874, which formed British Malaya (Abdullah, 2021). By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Malaysian Chinese were considered a prosperous group in Malaysia and Singapore, comprising several areas of trade and business, and acquiring a growing presence in the political sphere (Lauda, 2016). The end of the century also witnessed the evolution of clan associations' dynamics. The original leaders of the associations, and their descendants, started mixing their businesses with their associations roles, operating in a way which reassembles a contemporary family conglomerate, with associations pooling together on new business ventures, and even associations developing business rivalries which fostered the growth and competition of Chinese businesses (Drabble, 2000; Lowrie, 2024; Wu, 2011; Yen, 2008). Gomez (1999) highlights that the period stretching from the 1900s and the end of the 1940s can be considered a formative period for the modus operandi of contemporary Chinese business, marked by the inheritance and transfer of businesses developed in the previous century, between family members, with the younger generation adapting their businesses to the modern capitalist world, while looking to preserve traditional Chinese relationship aspects. As such, ethnic Chinese began taking a more active role in more key sensitive areas of British Malaya, such as banking, real estate and rubber production (Lowrie, 2024; Yen, 2008). The first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was also marked by a galvanization of nationalism, traced back to the Chinese defeat in the first Sino-Japanese War (1895) and further intensified by the fact that Sun Yat-Sen established one of his most relevant centers of operations in Penang, which further intensified ethnic tensions with Malays (Reid, 2010).

This nationalism would lead to several bans from British authorities on Chinese organizations during the 1930s, including the Kuomintang (Tay, 2018). Notwithstanding, by the time of the Japanese invasion of Malaysia in 1941, most of the bans were lifted, and we could observe a bigger cooperation between Malays and ethnic Chinese, with the latter playing a crucial role in the anti-Japanese resistance by means of the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (Maelzer, 2019). However, by 1948 and the declaration of

the Malayan Emergency, the fragile ethnic stability was disrupted by the British associating communist insurgency movements with ethnic Chinese, due to the suspicion that most of the communist propaganda was being disseminated by Chinese schools and centers funded by Chinese businesses in the post-war years (Freedman, 2000; Tay, 2018).

Despite this, by 1950, the British began efforts to establish an independent nation in the region, compiling an early treat draft that stated that Chinese, Malays and other ethnicities would have equal rights. This idea would face great contestation from two recently formed parties: the pro-Malay, United Malays National Organization (UMNO), founded in 1946, and the pro-Chinese, Malayan Chinese Association (MCA), founded in 1949, Chinese businessmen (Lee, 2013). After continued British pressure for a multiethnic nation, in 1952, the two parties set aside their differences to form the Alliance, taking advantage of the political power of UMNO and the economic power of the MCA (Abshire, 2011). This cooperation reached its apogee in the first independent election of the Federation of Malaya in 1957. On August 31 of the same year, the first independent constitution was drafted with the reality of economically dominant ethnic Chinese in mind, setting up a 30% hiring quota of *bumiputra* in companies (Constitution of the Federation of Malaya, 1957). The follow-up elections granted a victory to the Alliance coalition defining a decade-long social contract (Gomez, 1999). The Alliance granted the Finance, Trade and Industry portfolios to MCA, whilst UMNO would hold onto the political power and the remaining portfolios. This essentially created a social contract which allowed UMNO to keep political and cultural power, in opposition to the Chinese financial and trade power, guaranteeing a scenario of a fragile racial harmony for the next 12 years (Harding, 2024).

The consequences of this social contract gradually increased the economic dominance of Malaysian Chinese, and by the end of the 1960s, 98,5% of private businesses were owned by Malaysian Chinese, corresponding to close to 20% to 30% of the country's GDP, and allowing a scarce space for competition to arise (Husin, 2013). These economic factors, coupled with the results of the May 1969 elections, where the Alliance won the Malaysian general election with close to 58% of votes, but at the cost of losing almost 20 seats to newly formed left-wing parties such as the Gerakan and the Democratic Action Party, and losing its majority in key states such as Perak, Selangor, Penang and Kelantan, further heightened ethnic tensions (Kheng, 2002). Worries from UMNO regarding a possibly rise of the left-wing and a loss of Malay dominance led to a call for protests in Kuala Lumpur against the election results. The protest quickly turned violent, and Malay protesters attacked Malaysian Chinese residents, resulting in the death of 130 ethnic Chinese, and dozens of businesses and vehicles were burned down (Vethamani, 2019). The fallout of the protests led to the suspension of parliament and to the creation of the National Operations Council (NOC), whose main goal was to reestablish order in the country and find a solution for the ethnic tension (Bee, 2023).

The aftermath of these events would have lasting effects on Malaysian society, and from this point onwards, Malaysia's internal economic policymaking would be tightly knitted with the existence of Malaysian Chinese. The first example occurred in 1971, with the NOC launching of the New Economic Policy (NEP), a 20-year-long

plan deeply rooted in affirmative action policies for *bumiputra* and the goal to curtail ethnic Chinese economic power, under the guise of achieving national unity (Husin, 2013; Lee and Chew-Ging, 2017; Tan, 2012). In 1991, the National Development Policy (NDP), embedded in the wider national development goals of Vision 2020, continued this trend, albeit in a less restrictive manner (Chin, 2017).

Not only did the restrictions ease, but as the years went by, Malaysian leadership saw the increasing need to utilize Malaysian Chinese economic power to achieve the ambitious goal of 8% GDP growth to fulfill Vision 2020 (Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia, 1991). Both Prime Ministers of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohamad (1981–2003; 2018–2020) and Najib Razak (2009–2018) gradually adapted the NDP to include and accommodate the Malaysian Chinese, essentially solidifying early assessments that Malaysia's development was being shaped by the existence of these groups (Bee, 2023; Brown, 2010). The most notable shift occurred in 2009, when Najib amended the NEP's affirmative action policies, lowering the requirement quotas for *bumiputras* from 30% to 12.5%, and eliminating the quotas in some sectors (Burton, 2009). This move was highly unpopular with the main voter base of the BN, lowering Najib's popularity, leading to assumptions that the main purpose of this move was to stimulate Malaysian Chinese development toward the goals of the Vision 2020, whose fulfillment could yield better election results, and to possibly attract foreign Chinese investment (Brown, 2010). Malaysian Chinese took advantage of these trends, despite the resilience of affirmative action policies. These relationship dynamics between the state and this ethnic group continued to develop, and as recently as late 2024, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim highlighted the importance of Malaysian Chinese for the nation's development and for connecting to China (Bernama, 2024).

However, it is important to note that in recent years, Malaysian officials have had to carefully balanced this economic disparity, with the debate surrounding the possible removal or reform of affirmative action dominating the political stage (Jha, 2019). These tensions have become particularly heightened after the 2023 state election, which saw the rise of the Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS<sup>1</sup>), a populist Islamic and pro-Malay party, who strongly opposes the ruling Pakatan Harapan whose coalition includes the Democratic Action Party (DAP), a Chinese-majority party (Rachman, 2023). Since this moment, political discourse has been mostly marked by the PAS and its criticism of a supposed favoritism of Malaysian Chinese by PM Anwar's government (Said, 2024). In what can be seen as a possible focus of contention and debate for the next general elections, Malaysian Chinese have become a predominant target of tensions inside of Malaysian political discourse (Shukri, 2024; Sipalan, 2025). In fact, in August 2025, 12 opposition parties, under the guidance of the PAS, agreed to form a loose pro-Malay coalition, with one of the core founding premises being the fight against what these parties perceive as the unequal treatment of Malays in face of ethnic Chinese (Ghazali, 2025). This further adds to the relevant role that Malaysian Chinese still maintain in the political and economic sphere of contemporary Malaysia.

1 Originating from the Malay name Parti Islam Se-Malaysia.

With the framework established and the latter points in mind, it is now important to move on to the next section, and turn our attention to Chinese attempts at establishing a direct connection between these groups and China.

## China's engagement with Overseas Chinese

With this paper's focus of analysis going beyond traditional state-to-state relations, it now turns its attention to China's policies toward overseas Chinese and the connection of Malaysian Chinese with China. In the late 1960/s, China had a slow realization of the importance of overseas Chinese groups and began looking into strategies to reapproach them, specifically in ASEAN (Fitzgerald, 1970). Interestingly, one of China's early attempts to connect with these groups was targeted toward Malaysia. In June 1974, a meeting between Chinese and Malaysian representatives resulted in a failed attempt at creating a framework to define Malaysian Chinese and to what degree they can be classified as stateless Chinese (Soon, 1976). Despite this failure, Deng Xiaoping realized the importance of overseas ethnic Chinese for China's soft power and diplomatic strategy. As such, in 1978, Deng ordered the creation of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO), whose main goal was to reconnect China with its diaspora and promote a sense of Chinese cultural unity around the globe (Venkataraman, 1998). To this day, the Chinese diaspora policy has functioned on the basis that all Chinese living abroad, ethnic Chinese with foreign citizenship and Chinese share a strong cultural bond, despite possible political differences. Therefore, China has focused its efforts on encouraging the perception that overseas Chinese should work toward China's national interests, playing a key role in China's foreign policy (Suryadinata, 2024).

By the 2000s, China had successfully promoted a transnational vision of Chineseness amidst overseas Chinese, mostly directed at Southeast Asian Chinese, with economic benefits to invest in China, an easier emigration process and cultural links (Barabantseva, 2005), deepening connections to create a continuity between Chinese communities and the sense of sameness (Costa, 2020). These efforts were accompanied, and made possible, by the creation of dozens of organizations similar to the OCAO, with a strong emphasis on organizations seeking to attract overseas Chinese economic connectivity and cultural promotion, and ensuring overseas Chinese fulfilled their role as a soft power mechanism for China (Fan, 2010). Under President Xi Jinping, China has reinforced its policy toward overseas Chinese, with the latter frequently describing these Chinese groups as crucial for China's 2050 goals and for the success of projects like the BRI, and creating a more ambitious common civilisational narrative than its predecessors (China Daily, 2023; Du, 2024). Xi managed to fulfill such large-scale ambitions by centralizing organizations like the OCAO under the United Front Work Department's umbrella in 2018 (UFWD). Since then, the UFWD has been responsible for all of China's interactions with overseas Chinese, managing hundreds of organizations and assuring the fulfillment and spread of Chinese soft power (Groot, 2021; Tan, 2024).

China's policies toward overseas Chinese and its attempts to develop a seamless transnational network of Chinese, especially

in Southeast Asia, are almost completely aligned with the reality of the bamboo network. By this we mean that the focus on the economic and cultural aspects of approaching these Chinese groups shares strong similarities with preestablished bamboo network interactions dynamics that have historically shaped ethnic Chinese groups in Southeast Asia. As we will observe in the case of Malaysian Chinese, China's focus remained mostly on establishing economic connections, based on shared cultural values.

## China and the role of Malaysia Chinese Organizations

To understand China's policies toward Malaysian Chinese, it is important to note the creation of two organizations. First, the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Malaysia (ACCCIM) arises as an important organization for China's connection with the Malaysian Chinese. Founded in 1921, the ACCCIM acts as the main national organization for all local Malaysian Chinese chambers of commerce, business and entrepreneurs, amounting to almost 110,000 members (ACCCIM, 2025c). The ACCCIM openly states that its goals are to advance the interests of Malaysian Chinese business in the country and the region, whilst assuring a healthy relationship between these groups and the government, as well as assuring the contribution of Malaysian Chinese to the nation's socio-economic development (ACCCIM, 2025b). The ACCCIM has also had an active role in organizing events focused on assuring connectivity between Malaysian Chinese businessmen, China and other ethnic Chinese in ASEAN, such as the World Chinese Entrepreneurs Conference (WCEC) (ACCCIM, 2023a; Sunwah Staff, 2024). Created in 1990, the WCEC forms a transnational network that would connect ethnic Chinese businesses and conglomerates, and was founded jointly by Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCCI), the Chinese General Chamber of Commerce and Thai-Chinese Chamber of Commerce (WCEC, 2025).

However, by the foundation of the WCEC, Malaysia did not have a dedicated Chamber of Commerce for Sino-Malaysian relation, leading to the formation of the current Malaysia-China Chamber of Commerce (MCCC), in 1990 (MCCC, 2025b). Looking at the official site of the MCCC, the organization, and its constitution define themselves as multiethnic, non-governmental and independent, with the main purpose of serving as a liaison between China and Malaysia for business ventures (MCCC, 2025b). However, it has historically linked Malaysian Chinese with Chinese business since its inception. Since the 1990s, the majority of investment flow between Malaysia and China has been mediated by the MCCC and Malaysian Chinese, with China historically preferring to deal with Malaysian Chinese businesses and enterprises (Mosbah and Kalsom, 2018; Tze-Ken et al., 2018). Concurrently, since 2010, the MCCC has hosted the yearly Malaysia-China Entrepreneurs Conference (MCEC), whose goal is to connect all types of entrepreneurs across Malaysia with China. But by analyzing these conferences over the years, it is clear that the target demographic remains the Malaysian Chinese, with the group being the majority participants in the conference and occupying the leadership roles of the MCCC (MCCC, 2025d,c). Concurrently, although the MCCC presents itself as both Malaysian and Chinese,

its major partners are Chinese state organization or entities, such as the Embassy of the PRC in Malaysia, the OCAO, the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, and more (MCCC, 2025b).

It can be argued that the ACCCIM and the MCCC act as complementary organizations, with the first representing the broader reality of Malaysian Chinese businesses and the second focusing this representation on the relationship between China and Malaysia. Checking the participation in events and activities of both organizations, it is possible to find a significant amount of overlaps, specifically, in pertinent events involving China, such as the 17<sup>th</sup> WCEC and the 22<sup>nd</sup> China International Fair for Investment and Trade (State Council Information Office, 2022; Sunwah Staff, 2024). Although the MCCC serves as a complementary presence for Chinese economic contact with Malaysia, the ACCCIM, and its constituent chambers of commerce, take a more prominent role regarding its engagement with the Malaysian government.

Analyzing the available records on ACCCIM's official website, dating back to 2007, the organization has undertaken hundreds of advisory and policy meetings with the Malaysian government, and has been present in hundreds more of events related to governance (ACCCIM, 2025a). The ACCCIM is also the creator of the Socio-Economic Research Center, which provides frequent reports and yearly surveys for government consideration (SERC, 2025). However, this strong advisory relationship with the government can be traced back to the 1970's, encompassing a variety of issues such as minimum wage, foreign policy, ASEAN integration, and more, with the consensus that the ACCCIM has acquired a role as a trusted governmental partner and a spearhead position for regional connection with China and Chinese businesses (Birruntha, 2025; Ren, 2021; Whah and Lee, 2012). In fact, as recently as June 2025, Malaysian Minister of Housing and Local Government, Nga Kor Ming, met with the ACCCIM and highlighted the importance of the latter and Malaysian Chinese for their role in economic development and government advisory throughout the decades (Malaysia SME, 2025).

As such, we argue that one of the main Chinese mechanisms for economically connecting with Malaysian Chinese, and Malaysia in general, have been the ACCCIM and the MCCC, complying with China's economic-based approach to these groups. These organizations grant China a natural connection with the most influential Malaysian Chinese, and allow it to leverage this crucial connection through an organization that serves as an official channel toward the Malaysian government.

On the cultural aspect of this outreach, China has mostly relied on the Federation of Chinese Associations Malaysia, more commonly known as Huazong. The Huazong was founded in 1991, by the 13 largest Malaysian Chinese associations of Malaysia, each representing a state, with the aim of centralizing the ethnic Chinese community in Malaysia. Currently, it's comprised tens of thousands of Malaysian Chinese organizations mostly aimed at cultural promotion, education, economic activities and welfare (Huazong, 2025c). The organization promotes itself as the main connection point between China and the Malaysian Chinese, engaging in several cultural activities marked by the regular presence of Chinese representatives and government officials (Annuar, 2020; Huazong, 2025d). Concurrently, the Huazong has also been the key representative of Malaysian Chinese in China,

with the Chinese government establishing OCOA delegations to the Huazong since its inception (Weiwei, 2024). As such, the Huazong has remained a constant presence in all of the cultural and economic interactions between China and the Malaysian Chinese, with its representatives being considered informal advisors to Chinese and Malaysian delegations (Ibrahim, 2025; Shahabudin, 2024). The Huazong have also kept close ties with the MCCC and ACCCIM, sharing several of their members between both organizations (Ong, 2024).

As we can observe, China has actively engaged with Malaysian Chinese for the past decades, with the relationship being defined by economic and cultural factors. Albeit, this alone does not necessarily mean a greater goal on transposing such interaction to influence state-to-state relations, since most countries generally interact with their diasporas. However, when framed in the outspoken objectives and strategy of Chinese interactions with overseas Chinese, most specifically its focus on ensuring that overseas Chinese work toward China's grand strategy, it gives way to the premise that, to some extent, Malaysian Chinese can impact state-to-state relations.

## Malaysian Chinese and contemporary Sino-Malaysian relations: spearheading the BRI

Drawing on the findings of the previous sections and on our established analytical framework, this section will assess the extent of the influence Malaysian Chinese had on contemporary Sino-Malaysian Relations. This analysis will take into account that influence from ethnic groups can take a variety of forms, ranging from a more active stance to a more passive stance, focusing the analysis on BRI-related interactions.

However, before proceeding with our analysis, we deem it important to undertake a critical overview of the role Malaysia's governmental leadership had in deepening relations with China, and how it also became a factor of influence toward the adherence to the BRI. As analyzed previously, the 1970's, were marked by the launch of the NEP and increasing attempts to curtail Malaysian Chinese economic power. Despite these internal measures, a shift in foreign policy strategy was occurring inside of Malaysia's leadership, spearheaded by Prime Minister Tun Razak (Bing, 2021). This culminated in a state visit of PM Tun Razak to China in May 1974, leading Malaysia to become the first member of ASEAN to establish bilateral relations with China, originating the longest continuous bilateral relations between an ASEAN member and China (British Pathé Archives, 1974). The visit marked the launch stage for a gradual deepening of Sino-Malaysian relations. In fact, despite a gradual slowdown of relationship deepening in the 1980's, due to the anti-China stance of the early PM Mahathir administration, the 1990's, were marked by the realization that fostering bilateral relations with China was crucial, due to China's growing economic power and regional importance, and unavoidable growth in the world stage (Akhir et al., 2018).

The main consequence of the early efforts of PM TU Razak, was the development of stronger economic and trade relations between both states. Throughout the 1990s, Malaysia and China established

the framework for future economic relationship, with the signing of dozens of MoUs regarding trade and economic cooperation policies (Liow, 2000). This trend continued for several years, with Malaysia becoming China's biggest trading partner in 2009, and in 2013, the launch year of the BRI, total trade value reached \$106 billion, a bilateral record at the time (Chan, 2021). As of early 2024, China has remained the main trade partner of Malaysia, with a total trade value of \$190 billion, and holding the position of largest FDI provider to Malaysia, accounting for 34% of total FDI (MATrade, 2025; Xiao, 2025).

The entire process of closer economic ties occurred against the background of increasing South China Sea (SCS) disputes during the 1990s and 2000s, marked by several incidents, militarization and even the signing of a MoU on Defense and Cooperation in 2005 (Bing, 2015; Lockman, 2013). Notwithstanding, since the 2010s, and the emergence of the BRI, Malaysia's stance has become less assertive in regards to China's advances in the SCS, with current PM Anwar Ibrahim stating, in March 2024, that maintaining a contentious stance toward China in regional disputes is harmful to the region's development and economic prospects (Jackson, 2024). This can be observed as the culmination of an increasing phenomenon, where the further economic and financial relations deepen with China, the more lenient the stance of Malaysia's government becomes (Bing, 2015; Chen, 2013; Liow, 2000).

This reality further adds to the role Malaysia's government has had, for the past 50 years, in attempting to rebuild Sino-Malaysian relations, specifically in the fields of trade and economics, being willing to make small concessions regarding the SCS, in favor of a strong economic relationship deepening. These strong economic relations can be seen as catalysts and facilitators for the implementation of the BRI. Understanding this role is relevant, for it allows for a greater contextualization of the reality in which Malaysian Chinese operated when impacting Sino-Malaysian relations. Under this context, the section will continue with an analysis of the nuances of the connection between Malaysian Chinese, the Vision 2020 and the BRI.

Returning our focus toward Malaysian Chinese, as analyzed previously, since the post-independence period, Malaysian Chinese have been tightly connected to Malaysia's economic reality and national development. This factor became increasingly accentuated in 1991, with the launch of Vision 2020, and more gradual accommodation toward Malaysian Chinese in subsequent administrations. Interestingly, this period coincided with the establishment of closer economic ties between China and Malaysia in the early 1990's, which saw signing of dozens of (MoUs) regarding trade and economic cooperation policies, analyzed previously in this section. It is also important to note that even before 1974, individuals such as the famous Malaysian Chinese entrepreneurs Robert Kuok and Tan Sri Yeoh Tiong Lay, played key roles in establishing trade and economic relations with China. These roles included not only their own corporations, but also the creation of educational and cultural exchanges institutions, with both men being informal governmental advisors until the late 2010's (Lee, 2017; Liu, 2018; *The Straits Times*, 2017).

Since the late 2000s, Sino-Malaysian relationship deepening was mostly spearheaded by the needs of Vision 2020. A 2008 government report warned that the goals of Vision 2020 would

only be accomplished with a stable 8% yearly GDP growth for the next 12 years (Zalkapli, 2008). The report led PM Najib Razak to carry out a major liberalization plan in 2009, focused on attracting FDI to local ventures and on energy production and infrastructure development, as well as an easing of affirmative action policies (Burton, 2009). In 2013, Najib's close re-election, and growing reports warning that Vision 2020 was unattainable with the country's current economic growth and without deep infrastructure development across the country, intensified recommendations advising for greater investment waves (Bank Negara Malaysia, 2013; Nambiar, 2013). As such, in October 2013, Malaysia and China signed a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) focused on strengthening bilateral cooperation, increasing bilateral trade, and increasing Chinese investment (MFA China, 2013). A few months later, during the "40th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between Malaysia and China", Najib announced the official adherence of Malaysia to the BRI (State Council China, 2014). It is also important to note that even before 1974, individuals such as the famous Malaysian Chinese entrepreneurs Robert Kuok and Tan Sri Yeoh Tiong Lay, played key roles in establishing trade and economic relations with China. These roles included not only their own corporations, but also the creation of educational and cultural exchanges institutions, with both men being informal governmental advisors until the late 2010's (Lee, 2017; Liu, 2018; *The Straits Times*, 2017).

Regarding the timing of the CSP signing, it matches a period of dire economic needs of the Vision 2020. Since then, the BRI has steadily expanded in the country, targeting key development areas. By late 2023, Malaysia was fully integrated in the Digital Silk Road, with e-commerce representing 23% of the country's GDP, and with the AliCloud 5G Network being fully integrated in Malaysia's biggest cities and government systems (Bruni, 2023; Narayan, 2023; Ngeow, 2021). However, the most important BRI megaproject for Malaysian development is the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL), announced in 2016, and comprising 665 km of highspeed railway lines, transversing the Eastern coast of Malaysia until Kuantan Port, where it turns West until Klang Port, providing an essential connection for the underdeveloped eastern states (MRL, 2023). The project became so important, that PM Najib directly associated it with the Eleventh Malaysia Plan (2016–2020), the final plan of the Vision 2020, and even despite attempts in 2018, by then PM Mahathir, to stop the project, the latter would eventually admit that it was crucial for Vision 2020 and Malaysia's eastern development (Abas et al., 2016; Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia, 2019).

The ECRL and the BRI would further deepen Sino-Malaysian relations in the next administration of PM Anwar Ibrahim. In May 2023, Anwar reinforced the role of the ECRL within the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030, a plan that can be seen as an extension attempt to achieve the failed goals of Vision 2020, and whose goal was of 5% yearly GDP growth (Ghazali, 2023). By late 2023, reports shown that the ECRL had been crucial for job creation in Eastern Malaysia, bridging historical development divisions inside the country, and connecting Malaysia to the wider ASEAN infrastructure network (Yiau, 2023). In the same period, a report from the Ministry of Economy of Malaysia stated that the main catalyst for the country's current GDP growth was the growing



development of the Eastern states due to the ECRL (Ministry of Economy Malaysia, 2023b). The success of the BRI had wider spread repercussions in Sino-Malaysian relations, with Anwar gradually assuming a more passive stance toward SCS disputes throughout 2024 and 2025, with Malaysia recognizing the role of the ECRL in broader issues such as the Malacca Dilemma<sup>2</sup> (Jackson, 2024; MFA Malaysia, 2024; Reuters, 2024). In June 2025, Sino-Malaysian relations would again rise to a new level, with both sides agreeing to further strengthen the current CSP, referencing the close association of Chinese investment to Malaysian development as one of the main highlights of this relationship strengthening (MFA Malaysia, 2025).

We argue that the Vision 2020, and the lasting effect it still has in Malaysia development plans, was the main catalyst for the current relationship between Malaysia and China, spearheading several relationship strengthening steps, with the entry of the BRI appearing to be directly connected to the needs of the Vision 2020. As such, we also argue that within our analytical framework, this can be interpreted as a prime example of passive influencing by Malaysian Chinese in Sino-Malaysian relations. The creation of Vision 2020 was a direct consequence of ethnic societal relations with the Malaysian Chinese and historical continuities stemming from mid-20th-century economic policies. Over time, its course was constantly influenced by the need to accommodate the Malaysian Chinese, which in turn was utilized by subsequent governments as a justification and mechanism toward accommodating China and fomenting new relations. In essence, the more Vision 2020 developed, and the BRI expanded, the greater Sino-Malaysian relations deepened. Taking into account the relevance of the BRI for contemporary relations, the next section will analyze how, throughout this broader passive influencing, these ethnic groups played a key active role in Sino-Malaysian relations surrounding the initiative.

As this paper previously established, the ACCCIM has extensive experience in engaging with the Malaysian government in advisory roles and policy recommendations. Focusing our analysis on the post BRI announcement period, from 2013 until the end of 2024, official data from the ACCCIM's website shows that the organization has participated in over 1100 interactions with the Malaysian government, ranging from advisory meetings, committees and survey submissions, signing close to 70 MoU's with governmental agencies and bodies in the same period (ACCCIM, 2025a). In fact, since 2013, around 60% of the ACCCIM official business trips overseas have been to China, and 70% of the foreign delegations received by the ACCCIM have been of Chinese origin or Chinese government-related (ACCCIM, 2025a). In comparison,

from 2007 to 2012, we can find close to 150 interactions involving the Malaysian government, averaging a significantly lower amount of interaction per year when compared to the 2013–2024 period. For the same period of 2007–2012, this tendency also applies for the percentage of official business trips to China, representing around 40% of the total of overseas trips by the ACCCIM, and for foreign delegations received by the ACCCIM, albeit in a smaller scale, the percentage drops to 55% for Chinese origin or Chinese government related delegations (ACCCIM, 2025a).

As noted, there was an increase in interactions in the post-BRI period; however, the pre-BRI interaction still represented significant values and percentages. The pre-BRI interactions can be attributed to the Chinese strategy toward overseas Chinese previously analyzed in this paper. The 2000s were marked by a gradual expansion of China's strategy toward overseas Chinese and the creation of several dozen governmental organizations, under the leadership of the OCAO, aimed at reconnecting with ethnic Chinese groups and with a focus on economic connectivity. Under this context, the ACCCIM would be a natural partner for contact with China and these organizations. Concurrently, as previously established, one of the ACCCIM's goals is the promotion of connections with ethnic Chinese and China, and these new organizations could help fulfill this goal.

The data also indicates that interactions involving China become more frequent from 2017 onwards, the period when the ECRL began its initial expansion. Concurrently, since 2013, instances of public displays of promotion of closer Sino-Malaysian relations also became more frequent by the ACCCIM and the MCCC, with both organizations highlighting the importance of China for Malaysia's development (Bernama, 2023b; Foon, 2014; Yong, 2017). Adding to this, in mid-2024, the ACCCIM's SERC published an overview of the 50 years of Sino-Malaysian relations, where the BRI projects and PM Anwar's role are identified as key spotlights of these relations (SERC, 2024).

It is important to note that current PM Anwar Ibrahim has established a closer relationship with the ACCCIM over the years, matching its foreign policy stance toward China. Since Anwar's election in 2022, 12 high-level delegations have visited China, surpassing its predecessors, with the latter demonstrating an openly friendly stance toward China (MFA China, 2025). As noted in earlier sections, Anwar has also highlighted the importance of Malaysian Chinese, and it appears to have reflected in a governmental approach with the ACCCIM. During the 17<sup>th</sup> WCEC, Anwar appeared as a guest of honor, delivering a speech highlighting the need to develop a close relationship with China and the role that the ACCCIM and the MCCC had in the process (Sunwah Staff, 2024). A few months later, in February 2025, Anwar was the guest of honor at the ACCCIM Chinese New Year event, where he raised the importance of the chamber for businesses in Malaysia and the region (The Star, 2025).

The ACCCIM has also accompanied Anwar and the Malaysian government in official visits, with one of the most relevant ones occurring in January 2023, in Singapore. During this visit, both governments oversaw the signing of an MoU between the ACCCIM and the SCCCI, aimed at promoting regional investment (ACCCIM, 2024). This is an example of ethnic connectivity inside the bamboo network and a unique case of state-sponsored connectivity. For context, the SCCCI is the second largest chamber

<sup>2</sup> In November 2003, President Hu Jintao announced that one of China's main struggles was its dependence on the Straits of Malacca, which he coined as the "Malacca Dilemma". The term refers to the lack of alternatives for China's energy imports through the Straits of Malacca, which make up close to 70% of its oil and natural gas imports, and to the risk that a possible blockade of the Straits by an opposing great power might endanger China's energy security needs. The Malacca Dilemma has guided China's global strategy since its conception, particularly shaping its foreign policy towards Southeast Asia and the countries bordering the Strait of Malacca (Paszak, 2021).

of ethnic Chinese in the region, after the ACCCIM, and it has been a keen promoter of strong relations with China inside of ASEAN and the BRI (Liu and Ren, 2022; SCCCI, 2025). This further adds to the transnational aspect, identified in our framework, that Malaysian Chinese can adopt in actively influencing Sino-Malaysian relations. The ACCCIM appears to have expanded its influential role next to the Malaysian government in the last decade, with clear and outspoken objectives of promoting Sino-Malaysian relations.

Refocusing on the BRI, in 2016, the ACCCIM and its members helped establish key organizations associated with BRI and Chinese investment in Malaysia. The most prominent amongst them is the Malaysia-China Business Council, led by Malaysian Chinese and whose primary goal is promoting and supporting the implementation of BRI investments, specifically two twin industrial parks: the China-Malaysia Qinzhou Industrial Park and the Kuantan Industrial Park (KIP) (MCBC, 2025). The latter is the second biggest BRI project in Malaysia, with a cumulative investment of almost \$6 billion and employing close to 14000 people (Yiau, 2023). It also acts as the main supporting project of the ECRL in Malaysia's eastern coast, allowing for the expansion of Kuantan Port, one of the main BRI ports, a member of the China-Malaysia Port Alliance and a possible solution to the Malacca Dilemma (Bing, 2019; CMPA, 2019; Xuanmin and Juecheng, 2023). The ACCCIM currently stands as one of the main promoters of the KIP, and consequently of the ECRL, having signed an MoU in 2023, with both twin parks to promote the presence of Malaysian Chinese and other Malaysian businesses in the KIP, and in turn foment Malaysian investment in the Greater Bay Area (ACCCIM, 2023b).

Regarding the MCCC, its website lacks the detailed information of the ACCCIM regarding ventures and activities, but what is present are mostly BRI-related activities and BRI promotion publications (MCCC, 2025a). The MCCC has been a staunch promoter of Sino-Malaysian relations, and in recent years has focused mostly on the promotion of the ECRL projects, seeking to attract investments, and being a member of the Belt and Road Global Forum (BRGF, 2025; Wu, 2025). It can be argued that whilst the ACCCIM takes a leading role in the more active political maneuvering and inner workings of promoting Sino-Malaysian relations and the BRI, the MCCC acts as a supporting transnational agent. The yearly MCEC stands as the largest recurring bilateral business conference between Malaysia and China, with the participation of thousands of entrepreneurs, businesses and the frequent presence of other ethnic Chinese chambers of commerce within ASEAN (MCCC, 2025c). The MCCC also has an active role in leading delegations to China, to attend events similar to the MCEC, to attract more Chinese investment to the country, leading to frequent interactions with governmental agencies (MCS, 2024). In a 2022 interview, the vice-president of the MCCC defended this position, arguing that the MCEC has been the main means of developing a strong network between China and Malaysia (Liu and Ren, 2022).

Finally, despite not being directly connected to business activities or the BRI, we deem it significant to highlight the role of the Huazong in Sino-Malaysian relations. Unlike the ACCCIM or the MCCC, the Huazong has openly aimed to serve as a platform for Malaysian Chinese, without the limitations

of being business-oriented, and encompassing a more varied membership (Huazong, 2025c). As a result, Huazong's impact in Sino-Malaysian relations has mostly been noticeable in what we can consider people-to-people interactions, through cultural exchanges, educational initiatives and events. For instance, for the past 40 years, the Huazong has organized the Malaysian Chinese Cultural Festival, aimed at promoting Malaysian Chinese culture, but also promoting Chinese connectivity, with Chinese governmental officials being frequent guests of the festival (Huazong, 2025d,a).

Analyzing the Huazong's website, we can find hundreds of similar events and initiatives aimed at promoting Malaysian Chinese and Chinese culture, ranging from artistic performances, museum inaugurations, food festivals and more, demonstrating the active role the organization has in people-to-people interactions and the diffusion of Chinese culture in Malaysia (Huazong, 2025d). These cultural exchanges are not exclusive to Malaysia, with the Huazong also frequently being invited to cultural events in China, such as the 75th Anniversary Reception of the People's Republic of China (Huazong, 2024). The important role the Huazong has played in cultural exchanges with China has also granted the Huazong an important position in the broader Specter of high-level diplomacy. A key example of this occurred in March 2023, during the visit of PM Anwar Ibrahim to China, where the Huazong were part of the official Malaysia delegation and joint organizers of the reception for Anwar (Jesselton Times, 2023b). In June 2024, Huazong was also invited as a representative of the Malaysian Chinese to the 50th Anniversary Reception of Malaysia-China Diplomatic Relations, where Premier Li Qiang met with PM Anwar (Huazong, 2025b). More recently, in April 2025, a Huazong delegation also attended the welcoming state ceremony for the visit of Xi Jinping to Malaysia (Huazong, 2025e; MOFA Malaysia, 2025). Finally, in a similar course of action as the ACCCIM, the Huazong has also played advisory roles near the Malaysian government, usually associated with the promotion of Chinese tourism or ethnic tensions surrounding Malaysian Chinese (Jesselton Times, 2023a; Warta Oriental, 2025).

As observed in this section, the ACCCIM and the MCCC have had an active role in the promotion of the BRI in Malaysia, and in turn, on Sino-Malaysian relations. We can find a connection between the promotion of the BRI and the strengthening of Sino-Malaysian relations over the last decade. Concurrently, the Huazong has played a crucial role in cultural and people-to-people relations. The actions of these associations align with China's strategy toward overseas Chinese and the goal of utilizing ethnic Chinese to advance China's regional goals.

## Conclusion

This study sought to answer the question: How did Malaysian Chinese impact contemporary Sino-Malaysian relations? Drawing on an analytical framework which adapted previously established theories regarding passive and active influence of ethnic groups, into the reality of Malaysian Chinese, we concluded that Malaysian Chinese had significant passive influence and active influence in contemporary Sino-Malaysian relations, providing an influence platform beyond standard state relations.

Our first major finding relates to the motives and premises that defined contemporary Sino-Malaysian relations. The historic ethnic societal relations deeply shaped Malaysia's economic and development policies since the 1970s, leading to the creation of Vision 2020. Since that moment, Malaysia's development plans have been built and catered around the reality of the Malaysian Chinese. In turn, contemporary Sino-Malaysian relations saw a deepening as a result of the economic needs to achieve Vision 2020, being an example of passive influence. Our second major finding stresses that local Malaysian Chinese organizations have been the main active influencers of Sino-Malaysian interactions under the framework of the BRI. Both the ACCCIM and the MCCC have actively been a part of major interactions in contemporary Sino-Malaysian relations and have been leading promoters of the BRI, with the initiative being the current mechanism of relationship deepening. Finally, our third major finding shows that although the actions of Malaysian Chinese strongly deepen Sino-Malaysian relations, they appear to mostly be integrated in China's regional strategy for overseas Chinese and BRI soft power. The study does not intend to argue that Malaysian Chinese are doing the bidding of China, with the ECRL-associated development being an example of advancing Malaysia's goals. However, this tendency can be justified as a natural result of the deeply rooted inner working of the bamboo network, which promotes Chinese unity.

In addition, this article has sought to make an insightful contribution to the field of study of ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia by advancing a broader theoretical discussion of the relationship between Chinese ethnicity and foreign policy in the region. The results of this study can be included in a wider discussion of the extent of the impact that ethnic Chinese groups might have on the relations between other Southeast Asian states and China. When framed in the context of China's growing influence in the region, discussion aimed at understanding whether these groups might act as enablers, such as the Malaysian Chinese, or as constraints on a state's foreign policy toward China, gains greater relevance. Concurrently, this paper also sought to make a theoretical contribution to the study of ethnic Chinese and foreign policy. Drawing on the institutionalist approach, the analytical framework developed for this paper highlighted the importance of adapting established approaches to specific realities and complementing them with both exogenous and endogenous concepts. By nature, the institutionalist approach is quite flexible, and as such, the current contribution is not aimed at debating it. It is instead focused on providing a complementary framework for the specific case of Sino-Malaysian relations, which can easily be adapted and emulated for other similar cases in the region.

We recommend that future research should aim to further empirically quantify the actual economic and financial impact of Malaysian Chinese in Sino-Malaysian relations, through a more in-depth analysis of selected BRI projects, bilateral agreements and bilateral platforms. Furthermore, we add the recommendation that future studies could benefit from an added focus on grassroots perspectives and insights from interviews

with members of the Malaysian Chinese community. As it stands, we hope this paper can serve as a framework for future research on the topic and to further expand our knowledge of the role of ethnic Chinese groups in impacting state relations with China.

## Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

## Author contributions

DB: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft. CC: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

## Funding

The author(s) declare that financial support was received for the research and/or publication of this article. DB has received funding from the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology, under the grant number PRT/BD/154447/2023. doi: 10.54499/PRT/BD/154447/2023.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

## Generative AI statement

The author(s) declare that no Gen AI was used in the creation of this manuscript.

Any alternative text (alt text) provided alongside figures in this article has been generated by Frontiers with the support of artificial intelligence and reasonable efforts have been made to ensure accuracy, including review by the authors wherever possible. If you identify any issues, please contact us.

## Publisher's note

All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

## References

- Abas, A., Ariff, S. U., and Shahar, F. M. (2016). *Mind the Gap: ECRL Can Close East-West Coast Economic Divide, Says Najib*. New Straits Times. Available online at: <https://www.nst.com.my/news/2016/11/192672/mind-gap-ecrl-can-close-east-west-coast-economic-divide-says-najib> (Accessed July 5, 2025).
- Abdullah, A. H. B. (2021). *Colonial Historiography: A Non-Western Perspective of the Larut Wars (1861-1874)* (Ph.D. dissertation). International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- Abshire, J. E. (2011). *The History of Singapore*. Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood.
- ACCIM (2023a). *Máláixiyà Zhong Zong Yù Àomén Zhong Zong Xiéshou Tà Shāngjǐ* [Malaysia, Macau and China to expand business opportunities]. ACCIM Press Releases, June 26. Available online at: <https://www.accim.my/press-releases/accim-and-macao-chamber/> (Accessed July 9, 2025). Chinese.
- ACCIM (2023b). *Keynote Address At The 6th Seminar on the Twin Parks Cooperation Between Malaysia & China*. ACCIM Press Releases. Available online at: <https://www.accim.my/president-speeches/keynote-address-at-the-6th-seminar-on-the-twin-parks-cooperation-between-malaysia-china/> (Accessed July 9, 2025).
- ACCIM (2024). *SCCCI and ACCIM Establishing a Joint Steering Committee for Cooperation and Consultation (JSCCC) for Fostering Greater Economic Cooperation Among Singaporean and Malaysian Members*. ACCIM Press Releases. Available online at: <https://www.accim.my/press-releases/jsccl> (Accessed July 9, 2025).
- ACCIM (2025a). *ACCIM Press Releases*. Available online at: <https://www.accim.my/press-releases/> (Accessed July 9, 2025).
- ACCIM (2025b). *What We Do*. Available online at: <https://accim.org.my/en/what-we-do/> (Accessed July 9, 2025).
- ACCIM (2025c). *Who We Are*. Available online at: <https://accim.org.my/en/who-we-are/> (Accessed July 9, 2025).
- Akhir, M. N. M., Leong, L. C., and Ashraf, H. M. T. (2018). Malaysia-China bilateral relations, 1974-2018. *Int. J. East Asian Stud.* 7, 1–27. doi: 10.22452/IJEAS.vol7no1.1
- Annur, A. (2020). *Politicians, Corporate Chiefs, NGO Heads Come Together for Huazong CNY Dinner*. Yahoo News. Available online at: <https://malaysia.news.yahoo.com/politicians-corporate-chiefs-ngo-heads-134602496.html> (Accessed July 3, 2025).
- Bank Negara Malaysia (2013). *Economic Developments in 2013*. Kuala Lumpur: Bank Negara Malaysia. Available online at: <https://www.bnm.gov.my/documents/20124/830154/cp01.pdf> (Accessed June 30, 2025).
- Barabantseva, E. (2005). Trans-nationalising Chineseness: overseas Chinese policies of the PRC's central government. *ASIEN* 96, 7–28. doi: 10.11588/asien.2005.96.19709
- Bee, S. T. (2023). China-Malaysia relations as a campaign strategy: the BN Prime Ministers' understanding of China and the ethnic Chinese. *Int. J. China Stud.* 14, 29–48. doi: 10.2452/ijcs.vol14no1.2
- Bernama (2023a). *Malaysia Secures a Record RM170b Worth of Investment Commitment From China*. Bernama. Available online at: <https://www.bernamabiz.com/news.php?id=2178151/> (Accessed June 24, 2025).
- Bernama (2023b). *2024 Marks Important Milestone for Malaysia China Relations - ACCIM*. Bernama. Available online at: <https://www.bernamabiz.com/news.php?id=2258512/> (Accessed July 13, 2025).
- Bernama (2024). *PM Acknowledges Malaysian Chinese's Role in Economic, Socioeconomic Developments*. Bernama. Available online at: <https://www.bernama.com/en/business/news.php?id=2338757> (Accessed July 2, 2025).
- Bing, N. C. (2015). Comprehensive strategic partners but prosaic military ties: the development of Malaysia-China defence relations 1991-2015. *Contemp. Southeast Asia* 37, 269–304. doi: 10.1355/cs37-2e
- Bing, N. C. (2019). *Malaysia-China cooperation on the Belt and Road Initiative Under the Pakatan Harapan Government: Changes, Continuities, and Prospects*. NIDS Joint Research Series. 17, 25–42. Available online at: [https://www.nids.mod.gov.jp/english/publication/joint\\_research/series17/pdf/chapter02.pdf](https://www.nids.mod.gov.jp/english/publication/joint_research/series17/pdf/chapter02.pdf)
- Bing, N. C. (2021). *Have Friendly Malaysia-China Relations Gone Awry?* Carnegie China. Available online at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/07/16/have-friendly-malaysia-china-relations-gone-awry-pub-84981> (Accessed July 10, 2025).
- Birruntha, S. (2025). *Ministry's US Engagement Vital to Securing Equitable Trade for Malaysia: ACCIM*. Business Times. Available online at: <https://www.nst.com.my/business/corporate/2025/07/1242108/ministrys-us-engagement-vital-securing-equitable-trade-malaysia> (Accessed July 14, 2025).
- BRGF (2025). *About Us*. Available online at: <https://www.beltandroadglobalforum.com/en/aboutus> (Accessed July 16, 2025).
- British Pathé Archives (1974). *Malaysia: Tun Razak Returns From Peking To Sig Welcome*.
- Brown, K. (2010). Affirmative Action to Test Malaysian PM. *Financial Times*, March 28. Available online at: <https://www.ft.com/content/c6797d90-3a82-11df-b6d5-00144feabd0> (Accessed June 28, 2025).
- Bruni, I. C. G. (2023). *China's Digital Silk Road and Malaysia's Technological Neutrality*. The Diplomat. Available online at: <https://thediplomat.com/2023/08/chinas-digital-silk-road-and-malysias-technological-neutrality/> (Accessed July 1, 2025).
- Burton, J. (2009). *Malaysia in Major Liberalisation Drive*. Financial Times. Available online at: [https://www.ft.com/content/9daad488-6538-11de-8e34-00144feabd0?nclink\\_check=1](https://www.ft.com/content/9daad488-6538-11de-8e34-00144feabd0?nclink_check=1) (Accessed July 1, 2025).
- Chan, K. B., and Tong, C. K. (2014). "Singaporean Chinese doing business in China," in *Chinese Business: Rethinking Guanxi and Trust in Chinese Business Networks*, Ed. C. K. Tong (Singapore: Springer).
- Chan, T. K. (2021). "Malaysia: Chinese participation infrastructure from contractor to conspirator?" in *International Perspectives on the Belt and Road Initiative*, Eds. S. Sintusingha, H. Wu, S. S. Han, W. Lin, and B. Qin (London: Routledge), 137–164.
- Chen, S. (2013). *Malaysia Splits With ASEAN Claimants Over China Sea Threat*. Bloomberg. Available online at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-08-28/malaysia-splits-with-other-asean-claimants-over-china-sea-threat> (Accessed September 24, 2025).
- Chiang, B., and Cheng, J. C.-Y. (2019). "Chinese capital and Chinese cultural capital: a case study of Singkawang, West Kalimantan, Indonesia," in *The Sociology of Chinese Capitalism in Southeast Asia: Challenges and Prospects*, Ed. Y. Santasombat (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan), 315–330.
- Chin, Y. W. (2017). The state and Malaysian Chinese business: past, present and future. *Malays. J. Chin. Stud.* 6, 1–30. Available online at: <https://mjcs.newera.edu.my/journal/vol6/iss1/1/>
- China Daily (2023). *Xi's Remarks on Importance of Overseas Chinese*. China Daily. Available online at: <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202308/31/WS64f09da3a10d2dce4bb3372.html> (Accessed June 29, 2025).
- Ciorciari, J. D. (2019). The variable effectiveness of hedging strategies. *Int. Relat. Asia Pac.* 19, 523–555. doi: 10.1093/irap/lcz007
- CMPA (2019). *Background*. China-Malaysia Port Alliance. Available online at: <https://cmpa.asia/index.php/en/k2-blog/background> (Accessed July 7, 2025).
- Constitution of the Federation of Malaya (1957). *Official Website of the Government of Malaysia*. Available online at: [https://www.jac.gov.my/spk/images/stories/10\\_akta/perlembagaan\\_persekutuan/federal\\_constitution.pdf](https://www.jac.gov.my/spk/images/stories/10_akta/perlembagaan_persekutuan/federal_constitution.pdf) (Accessed June 26, 2025).
- Costa, C. M. (2020). "The imaginary of China: sameness and otherness from the perspective of Macau," in *Colonial Legacies and Contemporary Studies of China and Chineseness: Unlearning Binaries, Strategizing Self*, Eds. C. Shih, P. Manomaivibool, M. Tanigaki, and S. Singh (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte. Ltd.), 257–283.
- Daniels, T. (2025). *Malaysia's Relations With China and the United States in 2025*. Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia Commentary, March 20. Available online at: <https://www.isis.org.my/2025/03/20/malysias-relations-with-china-and-the-united-states-in-2025/> (Accessed June 24, 2025).
- Davis, D. R., and Moore, W. H. (1997). Ethnicity matters: transnational ethnic alliances and foreign policy behavior. *Int. Stud. Q.* 41, 171–184. doi: 10.1111/0020-8833.00037
- Drabble, J. H. (2000). *An Economic History of Malaysia, c. 1800–1990: The Transition to Modern Economic Growth*. Basingstoke: MacMillan Press LTD.
- Du, M. Y. (2024). *Xi Jinping's 'Great Rejuvenation of the Pan-Chinese Nation': A Historical Perspective*. Fulcrum. Available online at: <https://fulcrum.sg/xi-jinping-great-rejuvenation-of-the-pan-chinese-nation-a-historical-perspective/> (Accessed June 28, 2025).
- Fan, S.-P. (2010). The meaning of diplomacy policy on the China's present overseas Chinese affairs. *Int. Area Rev.* 13, 235–245. doi: 10.1177/223386591001300212
- Fitzgerald, S. (1970). China and the overseas Chinese: perceptions and policies. *China Q.* 44, 1–37. doi: 10.1017/S0305741000042818
- Foon, H. W. (2014). *MCCC: Malaysia to See Influx of China FDI*. The Edge Malaysia. Available online at: <https://theedgemaalaysia.com/article/mccc-malaysia-see-influx-china-fdi> (Accessed July 3, 2025).
- Freedman, A. L. (2000). "Malaysia: institutionalized participation," in *Political Participation and Ethnic Minorities: Chinese Overseas in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the United States* (New York, NY: Routledge), 49–87.
- Gerstl, A. (2022). *Hedging Strategies in Southeast Asia: ASEAN, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam and Their Relations with China*. London: Routledge.
- Ghazali, N. F. (2023). *ECRL a Catalyst for East Coast Development, Says Anwar*. Malaysiakini. Available online at: <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/664926> (Accessed July 1, 2025).
- Ghazali, N. F. (2025). *12 Opposition Parties Agree to Form Loose Coalition Against Govt*. Malaysiakini. Available online at: <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/752659> (Accessed September 27, 2025).

- Goh, E. (2018). "ASEAN-led multilateralism and regional order: the great power bargain deficit" in *International Relations and Asia's Southern Tier*, Eds. G. Rozman and J. C. Liow (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan), 45–62. 3171-7\_4
- Gomez, E. T. (1999). *Chinese Business in Malaysia: Accumulation, Ascendance, Accommodation*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.
- Gomez, E. T., and Benton, G. (2004). "Introduction: de-essentializing capitalism: Chinese enterprise, transnationalism and identity," in *Chinese Enterprise, Transnationalism and Identity*, Eds. E. T. Gomez and G. Benton (London: Routledge), 1–32.
- Grincheva, N. (2024). The past and future of cultural diplomacy. *Int. J. Cult. Policy* 30, 172–191. doi: 10.1080/10286632.2023.2183949
- Groot, G. (2021). "The CCP's united front work department: roles and influence at home and abroad," in *The Routledge Handbook of Chinese Studies*, Eds. C. Shei and W. Wei (London: Routledge), 384–398.
- Haacke, J. (2019). The concept of hedging and its application to Southeast Asia: a critique and a proposal for a modified conceptual and methodological framework. *Int. Relat. Asia Pac.* 19, 375–417. doi: 10.1093/irap/lcz010
- Halim, K. H. K., Iskandar, M. A., Abdullah, L., Damin, Z. A. H., Yusof, Y., Razali, J. R., et al. (2024). Exploring the Malaysian Chinese business: a review. *Int. J. Humanit. Technol. Civiliz.* 9, 10–15. doi: 10.15282/ijhtcv9i1.10673
- Harding, A. (2024). "Power-sharing in Malaysia: coalition politics and the social contract," in *Power-Sharing in the Global South: Patterns, Practices and Potentials*, Eds. E. W. Aboultaif, S. Keil, and A. McCulloch (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan), 169–188.
- Harshe, R. (2006). Culture, identity and international relations. *Econ. Polit. Wkly* 41, 3939–3945. Available online at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4418700>
- Hosseini, H. (2019). Dearborn-Detroit Michigan: ethnography of faith and the U.S. domestic and foreign policy axis. *J. World Sociopolit. Stud.* 2, 69–86. doi: 10.22059/wsp.2018.65219
- Huazong (2024). *Huazong Invited to China's National Day*. Available online at: <https://www.dama-huazong.com/event-detail/中国国庆> (Accessed September 23, 2025).
- Huazong (2025a). *40th Cultural Festival Flag Raising Ceremony*. Available online at: <https://www.dama-huazong.com/event-detail/升旗礼> (Accessed September 23, 2025).
- Huazong (2025b). *50th Anniversary Reception of Malaysia-China Diplomatic Relations*. Available online at: <https://www.dama-huazong.com/event-detail/马马马与中国建交50周年纪念招待会> (Accessed September 23, 2025).
- Huazong (2025c). *Huazong Overview*. Available online at: <https://www.dama-huazong.com/info> (Accessed September 23, 2025).
- Huazong (2025d). *Latest Events*. Available online at: <http://www.huazong.my/recent-activity> (Accessed September 23, 2025).
- Huazong (2025e). *Welcoming Banquet for Chinese President Xi Jinping*. Available online at: <https://www.dama-huazong.com/event-detail/欢迎中国国家主席习近平国宴> (Accessed September 23, 2025).
- Husin, W. N. W. (2013). Business dominance among the Malays and Chinese in Malaysia from a civilizational perspectives. *Int. J. Soc. Sci. Humanit.* 3, 360–364. doi: 10.7763/IJSSH.2013.V3.262
- Ibrahim, J. (2025). *State Banquet Welcoming Chinese President Xi Jinping Features Traditional Cuisine, Performances*. The Star. Available online at: <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2025/04/16/state-banquet-welcoming-chinese-president-xi-jinping-features-traditional-cuisine-performances> (Accessed July 1, 2025).
- Jackson, L. (2024). *Trying to Contain China Will Only Fuel its Grievances, Says Malaysian PM*. Reuters. Available online at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/trying-contain-china-will-only-fuel-its-grievances-says-malaysian-pm-2024-03-07/> (Accessed July 1, 2025).
- Jackson, V. (2014). Power, trust, and network complexity: three logics of hedging in Asian security. *Int. Relat. Asia Pac.* 14, 331–356. doi: 10.1093/irap/lcu005
- Jesselton Times (2023a). *Huazong Proposes Govt to Launch 'Visit Malaysia Year' Campaign to Better Attract Chinese Tourist*. Jesselton Times. Available online at: <https://jesseltontimes.com/2023/01/18/huazong-proposes-govt-to-launch-visit-malaysia-year-campaign-to-better-attract-chinese-tourists/> (Accessed September 24, 2025).
- Jesselton Times (2023b). *Anwar Warmly Greeted by Huazong Delegation Upon Arrival in Beijing*. Jesselton Times. Available online at: <https://jesseltontimes.com/2023/03/30/anwar-warmly-greeted-by-huazong-delegation-upon-arrival-in-beijing/> (Accessed September 24, 2025).
- Jha, P. (2019). *Can New Malaysia Move Beyond Old Race Divides? The Diplomat*. Available online at: <https://thediplomat.com/2019/08/can-new-malaysia-move-beyond-old-race-divides/> (Accessed September 25, 2025).
- Johnston, A. I., and Ross, R. S. eds. (1999). *Engaging China: The Management of an Emerging Power*. London: Routledge.
- Jones, D. M., and Jenne, N. (2022). Hedging and grand strategy in Southeast Asian foreign policy. *Int. Relat. Asia Pac.* 22, 205–235. doi: 10.1093/irap/lcab003
- Kesteley, J., Riordan, S., and Ruël, H. (2014). Introduction: business diplomacy. *Hague J. Dipl.* 9, 303–309. doi: 10.1163/1871191X-12341294
- Kheng, C. B. (2002). *Malaysia: The Making of a Nation*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- King, C., and Melvin, N. J. (2000). Diaspora politics: ethnic linkages, foreign policy, and security in Eurasia. *Int. Secur.* 24, 108–138. doi: 10.1162/016228899560257
- Koga, K. (2018). The concept of "hedging" revisited: the case of Japan's foreign policy strategy in East Asia's power shift. *Int. Stud. Rev.* 20, 633–660. Available online at: <https://academic.oup.com/isr/article/20/4/633/4781685>
- Korolev, A. (2019). Shrinking room for hedging: system-unit dynamics and behavior of smaller powers. *Int. Relat. Asia Pac.* 19, 419–452. doi: 10.1093/irap/lcz011
- Kuik, C.-C. (2016). Malaysia between the United States and China: what do weaker states hedge against? *Asian Polit. Policy* 8, 155–177. doi: 10.1111/aspp.12240
- Kuik, C.-C. (2021). "Elite legitimation and the agency of the host country: evidence from Laos, Malaysia and Thailand's BRI engagement," in *Global Perspectives on China's Belt and Road Initiative: Asserting Agency Through Connectivity*, Ed. F. Schneider (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press).
- Kuik, C.-C. (2022). Hedging via institutions: ASEAN-led multilateralism in the age of the Indo-Pacific. *Asian J. Peacebuild.* 10, 355–386. doi: 10.18588/202211.00a319
- Kuik, C.-C. (2024). Explaining hedging: the case of Malaysian equidistance. *Contemp. Southeast Asia* 46, 43–76. doi: 10.1355/CS46-1c
- Kuik, C.-C., and Jamil, N. S. (2025). "Chapter 3: the future of Malaysia's China policy: factors determining small-state hedging," in *Malaysia-China Relations*, Eds. K. L. Ho and C. C. Kuik (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte. Ltd.), 35–54.
- Kuik, C.-C., and Lai, Y. M. (2023). Deference and defiance in Malaysia's China policy: determinants of a dualistic diplomacy. *Int. J. Asian Stud.* 20, 353–372. doi: 10.1017/S1479591423000104
- Lai, Y. M., De Silva, M., and Wang, Y. (2023). Crouching tiger, ascending dragon: the trends and dynamics of Malaysia-China relations. *Kaji. Malays.* 41, 85–108. doi: 10.21315/km2023.41.1.5
- Lapid, Y., and Kratochwil, F. eds. (1995). *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Lauda, J. T. (2016). *Economic Success of Chinese Merchants in Southeast Asia: Identity, Ethnic Cooperation and Conflict*. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag.
- Lee, C., and Chew-Ging, L. (2017). The evolution of development planning in Malaysia. *J. Southeast Asian Econ.* 34, 436–461. doi: 10.1355/ae34-3b
- Lee, K. C. (2013). *Golden Dragon and Purple Phoenix: The Chinese and Their Multi-Ethnic Descendants in Southeast Asia*. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte. Ltd.
- Lee, K. H. (2017). Robert Kuok: businessman and philanthropist. *Malays. J. Chin. Stud.* 6, 83–102. Available online at: <https://mjcs.newera.edu.my/journal/vol6/iss1/2/>
- Liow, J. C. Y. (2000). Malaysia-China relations in the 1990s: the maturing of a partnership. *Asian Surv.* 40, 672–691. doi: 10.2307/3021188
- Liu, C. (2018). *China Expects 'Next Level' Relations With Malaysia as Mahathir Enlists Robert Kuok in Diplomatic Push*. South China Morning Post. Available online at: <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/2147648/robert-kuok-part-malaysian-pm-mahathir-mohamads-plans-strong-ties> (Accessed September 24, 2025).
- Liu, H., and Ren, N. (2022). Southeast Asian Chinese engage a rising China: business associations, institutionalised transnationalism, and the networked state. *J. Ethn. Migr. Stud.* 48, 873–893. doi: 10.1080/1369183X.2021.1983952
- Lockman, S. (2013). *Why Malaysia Isn't Afraid of China (for Now)*. The Strategist. Available online at: <https://www.aspistrate.com> (Accessed September 25, 2025).
- Lowrie, C. (2024). Exceptions to the abolition of Chinese indenture: Chinese workers on rubber estates in Interwar British Malaya. *J. Slave Post-Slave Stud.* 45, 541–561. doi: 10.1080/0144039X.2024.2344393
- Maelzer, R. (2019). *Chinese Malaysians Strive to Keep Memories of Japanese Occupation Alive*. CGTN. Available online at: <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2019-08-15/Chinese-Malaysians-keep-memories-of-Japanese-occupation-alive-JbpsinQzXq/index.html> (Accessed September 23, 2025).
- Malaysia SME (2025). *The Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Malaysia's Meeting With Minister of Housing and Local Government*. Malaysia SME. Available online at: <https://www.malaysiasme.com.my/the-associated-chinese-chambers-of-commerce-and-industry-of-malaysias-meeting-with-minister-of-housing-and-local-government/> (Accessed July 1, 2025).
- Manor, I., and Huang, Z. A. (2022). Digitalization of public diplomacy: concepts, trends, and challenges. *Commun. Public* 7, 167–175. doi: 10.1177/20570473221138401
- MATrade (2025). *Trade Performance for Year 2024 and December 2024*. Available online at: <https://www.matrade.gov.my/en/about-matrade/media/press-releases/6264-trade-performance-for-year-2024-and-december-2024> (Accessed September 22, 2025).
- MCBC (2025). *Malaysia-China Kuantan Industrial Park (MCKIP)*. Available online at: <https://mcbc.com.my/mckip/> (Accessed July 8, 2025).
- MCCC (2025a). *Activities Report*. Available online at: <https://mccc.my/en/category/activity-reports-en/> (Accessed July 9, 2025).

- MCCC (2025b). *Introduction of the Association*. Available online at: <https://mccc.my/en/about/mccc-introduction/> (Accessed July 9, 2025).
- MCCC (2025c). *MCEC+*. Available online at: <https://mccc.my/en/mcec/> (Accessed July 9, 2025).
- MCCC (2025d). *National Council*. Available online at: <https://mccc.my/en/about/national-council/> (Accessed July 9, 2025).
- MCS (2024). *Malaysia-China Summit*. Available online at: <https://malaysia-chinasummit.com.my/> (Accessed July 2, 2025).
- MFA China (2013). *President Xi Jinping Holds Talks with Prime Minister Najib Razak of Malaysia, Deciding to Establish China-Malaysia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership*. Available online at: [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/gjhdq\\_665435/2675\\_665437/2732\\_663468/2734\\_663472/201310/t20131006\\_517425.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/gjhdq_665435/2675_665437/2732_663468/2734_663472/201310/t20131006_517425.html) (Accessed July 1, 2025).
- MFA China (2025). *Malaysia - Activities*. Available online at: [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/gjhdq\\_665435/2675\\_665437/2732\\_663468/2734\\_663472/](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/gjhdq_665435/2675_665437/2732_663468/2734_663472/) (Accessed July 6, 2025).
- MFA Malaysia (2024). *Joint Statement between the People's Republic of China and Malaysia on Deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership towards China-Malaysia Community with a Shared Future*. Available online at: <https://www.kln.gov.my/web/guest/-/joint-statement-between-the-people-s-republic-of-china-and-malaysia-on-deepening-the-comprehensive-strategic-partnership-towards-china-malaysia-commun> (Accessed July 1, 2025).
- MFA Malaysia (2025). *Joint Statement Between the People's Republic of China and Malaysia on Building a High-level Strategic Malaysia-China Community with a Shared Future*. Available online at: <https://www.kln.gov.my/web/guest/-/joint-statement-between-the-people-s-republic-of-china-and-malaysia-on-building-a-high-level-strategic-malaysia-china-community-with-a-shared-future-1> (Accessed July 1, 2025).
- Ministry of Economy Malaysia (2023a). *Household Income, Poverty and Household Expenditure*. Putrajaya: Ministry of Economy Malaysia. Available online at: <https://www.ekonomi.gov.my/en/socio-economic-statistics/household-income-poverty-and-household-expenditure> (Accessed June 26, 2025).
- Ministry of Economy Malaysia (2023b). *The Malaysian Economy in Figures - 2023*. Putrajaya: Ministry of Economy Malaysia. Available online at: [https://www.ekonomi.gov.my/sites/default/files/2024-06/The\\_Malaysian\\_Economy\\_in\\_Figures\\_2023.pdf](https://www.ekonomi.gov.my/sites/default/files/2024-06/The_Malaysian_Economy_in_Figures_2023.pdf) (Accessed June 30, 2025).
- MOFA Malaysia (2025). *State Visit by the President of the People's Republic of China to Malaysia, 15-17 April 2025*. April 17. Available online at: <https://www.kln.gov.my/web/guest/-/state-visit-by-the-president-of-the-people-s-republic-of-china-to-malaysia-15-17-april-2025> (Accessed September 26, 2025).
- MOFA PRC (2025). *Joint Statement Between the People's Republic of China and Malaysia on Building a High-level Strategic China-Malaysia Community with a Shared Future*. April 17. Available online at: [https://www.mfa.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xw/zyxw/202504/t20250417\\_11595814.html](https://www.mfa.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xw/zyxw/202504/t20250417_11595814.html) (Accessed June 24, 2025).
- Moore, W. H. (2002). Ethnic minorities and foreign policy. *SAIS Rev.* 22, 77–91. doi: 10.1353/sais.2002.0043
- Mosbah, A., and Kalsom, A. W. (2018). Chinese family business in Malaysia: development, culture and the family business philosophy. *Int. J. Acad. Res. Bus. Soc. Sci.* 8, 997–1006. doi: 10.6007/IJARBS/v8-i5/4436
- MRL (2023). *MRL - Overview*. Available online at: <https://www.mrl.com.my/en/ecrli/overview/> (Accessed July 1, 2025).
- Nambiar, S. (2013). *How Will the 2013 Malaysian Election Affect the Economy?* East Asia Forum. Available online at: <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2013/01/31/how-will-the-2013-malaysian-election-affect-the-economy/> (Accessed July 1, 2025).
- Narayan, J. (2023). *EU, US Warn Malaysia of Security Risk in Huawei's Bid for 5G Role*, *Financial Times Reports*. Reuters. Available online at: <https://www.reuters.com/technology/eu-us-warn-malaysia-national-security-risk-huawei-bid-5g-role-ft-2023-05-02/> (Accessed July 1, 2025).
- Ngeow, C.-B. (2021). "Malaysia and the Belt and Road Initiative: maritime, rail, and digital connectivity," in *Research Handbook on the Belt and Road Initiative*, Eds. J. C. Liow, H. Liu, and G. Xue (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited), 151–161.
- Ong, A. (2024). *Huazong: Chinese Entrepreneurs Favour Malaysia for Familiar Community*. Harapan Daily. Available online at: <https://harapandaily.com/2024/08/06/huazong-chinese-entrepreneurs-favour-malaysia-for-familiar-community/> (Accessed June 30, 2025).
- Pamment, J., Fjällhed, A., and Smedberg, M. (2024). The 'logics' of public diplomacy: in search of what unites a multidisciplinary research field. *Hague J. Dipl.* 19, 49–83. doi: 10.1163/1871191x-bja10161
- Park, S. (2023). "Constructivism," in *International Organization and Global Governance*, 3rd Edn., Eds. T. G. Weiss and R. Wilkinson (London: Routledge), 125–136.
- Paszak, P. (2021). *China and the "Malacca Dilemma."* Warsaw Institute. Available online at: <https://warsawinstitute.org/china-malacca-dilemma/> (Accessed September 23, 2025).
- Payne, J. G. (2009). Reflections on public diplomacy: people-to-people communication. *Am. Behav. Sci.* 53, 579–606. doi: 10.1177/0002764209347632
- Pouliot, V. (2004). The essence of constructivism. *J. Int. Relat. Dev.* 7, 319–336. doi: 10.1057/palgrave.jird.1800022
- Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia (1991). *Vision 2020: Malaysia as a Fully Developed Country*. Putrajaya: Prime Minister's Department.
- Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia (2019). *Press Statement by Yab Prime Minister Tun Dr. Mahatir Bin Mohamad on East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) Project*. Available online at: [https://www.pmo.gov.my/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Press-Statement-by-PM-on-ECRL\\_15April2019.pdf](https://www.pmo.gov.my/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Press-Statement-by-PM-on-ECRL_15April2019.pdf) (Accessed July 1, 2025).
- Rachman, J. (2023). Ethnic Tensions Simmer Under Malaysia's Elections. *Foreign Policy*, August 14. Available online at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/08/14/malaysia-elections-ethnic-tensions-chinese-malay-islam-nationalism/> (Accessed September 25, 2025).
- Redding, G. (1990). *The Spirit of Chinese Capitalism*. Berlin: De Gruyter. doi: 10.1515/9783110887709
- Reeves, J. (2004). *Culture and International Relations: Narratives, Natives and Tourists*. London: Routledge.
- Reid, A. (2010). *Imperial Alchemy: Nationalism and Political Identity in Southeast Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ren, N. (2021). Transnational networks and institutional embeddedness: reengagement of the new generation of Malaysian Chinese entrepreneurs with China. *Asian J. Soc. Sci.* 49, 215–224. doi: 10.1016/j.ajss.2021.09.007
- Reuters (2024). *Malaysia Open to Talks With Beijing Over Dispute in South China Sea - PM*. Reuters. Available online at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/malaysia-open-talks-with-beijing-over-dispute-south-china-sea-pm-2023-04-03/> (Accessed July 2, 2025).
- Ruël, H. (2020). Multinational corporations as diplomatic actors: an exploration of the concept of business diplomacy. *Diplomatica* 2, 1–12. doi: 10.1163/25891774-00201001
- Said, I. (2024). *Malaysia's Anwar Ibrahim Faces the Demons He Helped Unleash*. The Diplomat, April 8. Available online at: <https://thediplomat.com/2024/04/malaysias-anwar-ibrahim-faces-the-demons-he-helped-unleash/>
- Saideman, S. M. (2002). The power of the small: the impact of ethnic minorities on foreign policy. *SAIS Rev.* 22, 93–105. doi: 10.1353/sais.2002.0050
- SCCCI (2025). *Press Releases*. Available online at: <https://www.sccci.org.sg/press-releases> (Accessed July 7, 2025).
- SERC (2024). *50th Anniversary of China-Malaysia Relations: Reflecting the Past, Working Towards A Shared Future*. Presentation at China-Malaysia Think Tank Forum. Available online at: <https://www.accimserc.com/images/researchpdf/2024/20240622%20China-Malaysia%20Think%20Tank%20Forum.pdf> (Accessed July 9, 2025).
- SERC (2025). *Research*. Available online at: <https://www.accimserc.com/research> (Accessed July 10, 2025).
- Shahabudin, S. (2024). *Malaysia-China Trade and Culture Forum Strengthens Ties*. Business Times. Available online at: <https://www.nst.com.my/business/corporate/2024/10/1125653/malaysia-china-trade-and-culture-forum-strengthens-ties> (Accessed July 1, 2025).
- Shambaugh, D. (2021). *Where Great Powers Meet: America and China in Southeast Asia*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Shukri, S. (2024). *The Risks and Perceived Rewards of Rising Revivalist Populism in Malaysia*. Fulcrum. Available online at: <https://fulcrum.sg/the-risks-and-perceived-rewards-of-rising-revivalist-populism-in-malaysia/> (Accessed September 26, 2025).
- Sipalan, J. (2025). *Malaysian PAS Slams Member's 'Racist' Post on Country's Chinese 3-Star General*. South China Morning Post. Available online at: <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3315895/malaysian-pas-slams-members-racist-post-country-chinese-3-star-general> (Accessed September 26, 2025).
- Soon, L. T. (1976). Overseas Chinese and ASEAN-China diplomatic relations. *Philipp. Sociol. Rev.* 24, 127–132.
- State Council China (2014). *China, Malaysia Celebrate 40th Anniversary of Diplomatic Ties*. Available online at: [http://english.www.gov.cn/premier/news/2014/08/23/content\\_281474983010666.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/premier/news/2014/08/23/content_281474983010666.htm) (Accessed July 2, 2025).
- State Council Information Office (2022). *SCIO Briefing on the 22nd China International Fair for Investment & Trade*. Available online at: [http://english.scio.gov.cn/pressroom/node\\_8032369.htm](http://english.scio.gov.cn/pressroom/node_8032369.htm) (Accessed July 1, 2025).
- Sung, H.-C. (2019). "Chinese capitalism and the development of the ASEAN Economic Community: a perspective of securitization," in *The Sociology of Chinese Capitalism in Southeast Asia: Challenges and Prospects*, Ed. Y. Santasombat (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan), 27–55.
- Sunwah Staff (2024). *17th World Chinese Entrepreneurs Convention Kicks Off in Malaysia*. Available online at: <https://sunwahvietnam.com/17th-world-chinese-entrepreneurs-convention-kicks-off-malaysia.html> (Accessed July 5, 2025).
- Suryadinata, L. (2024). *Has China Changed its Policy Towards Chinese Overseas? ISEAS Perspective No. 2024/89*. Singapore: ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute. Available online at: <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/2024->

- 89-has-china-changed-its-policy-towards-chinese-overseas-by-leo-suryadinata/ (Accessed September 27, 2025).
- Tan, C.-B. (2012). "Malaysia: ethnicity, nationalism and nation-building," in *Malaysian Chinese: Recent Developments and Prospects*, Eds. H. G. Lee and L. Suryadinata (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing), 1–26.
- Tan, C.-B. (2024). "Chinese overseas and China's soft power," in *Rising China's Soft Power in Southeast Asia: Impact on Education and Popular Culture*, Ed. L. Suryadinata (Singapore: ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute), 25–48.
- Tan, M. I., Lee, K. H., and Lee, K. Y. (2024). Does China matter to the Chinese overseas? A case study of Malaysian Chinese businesses. *Translocal Chin. East Asian Perspect.* 18, 148–174. doi: 10.1163/24522015-17020004
- Tay, S. (2018). *Communist Party of Malaya. National Library Board Singapore Infopedia*. Available online at: [https://web.archive.org/web/20190423034807/http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP\\_2018-03-28\\_141257.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20190423034807/http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_2018-03-28_141257.html) (Accessed September 25, 2025).
- The Star (2025). *Anwar Joins Business Leaders at ACCCIM Chinese New Year Event*. The Star. Available online at: <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2025/02/04/anwar-joins-business-leaders-at-accim-chinese-new-year-event> (Accessed July 8, 2025).
- The Straits Times (2017). *Malaysia's YTL Group Founder Yeoh Tiong Lay Dies Aged 88*. The Straits Times. Available online at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/malaysias-ytl-group-founder-yeoh-tiong-lay-dies-aged-88> (Accessed September 26, 2025).
- Turpeau, A. B. (1960). People to people diplomacy. *World Aff.* 123, 104–107.
- Tze-Ken, D. W., Cheok, C. K., and Hin, L. K. (2018). *The Chinese Overseas in Malaysia in an Era of Change*. Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press.
- Venkataraman, M. (1998). An analysis of China's 'overseas Chinese' policy. *China Rep.* 34, 165–178. doi: 10.1177/000944559803400201
- Verver, M., and Dahles, H. (2013). The anthropology of Chinese capitalism in Southeast Asia: from culture to institution? *J. Bus. Anthropol.* 2, 93–114. doi: 10.22439/jba.v2i1.4073
- Vethamani, M. E. (2019). The Malaysian albatross of May 13, 1969 racial riots. *Sun Yat-Sen J. Humanit.* 49, 19–41. Available online at: <https://rpb17.nsysu.edu.tw/p/405-1173-242722,c19210.php#2>
- Wang, S. (2016). China's people-to-people diplomacy and its importance to China-EU relations: a historical institutionalism perspective. *J. China Int. Relat.* 4, 1–19. doi: 10.5278/ojs.jcir.v4i1.1512
- Warta Oriental (2025). *Huazong Hails Cabinet's Decision on Proposed Guidelines, Hopes JAKIM Respect Cabinet Consensus*. Warta Oriental. Available online at: <https://wartaoriental.com/2025/02/08/huazong-hails-cabinets-decision-on-proposed-guidelines-hopes-jakim-respect-cabinet-consensus/> (Accessed September 25, 2025).
- WCEC (2025). *About Us*. Available online at: <https://wcecofficial.org/en/> (Accessed July 2, 2025).
- Weber, M. (2013). Between 'isses' and 'oughts': IR constructivism, critical theory, and the challenge of political philosophy. *Eur. J. Int. Relat.* 20, 516–543. doi: 10.1177/1354066112466573
- Weimei, X. (2024). "Rock-solid" Ties Benefit China, Malaysia. China Daily. Available online at: <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202406/13/WS666a53b1a31082fc043cc42a.html> (Accessed June 30, 2025).
- Whah, C. Y., and Lee, Y. F. (2012). Chambers of commerce and Chinese business enterprise in Malaysia. *Malays. J. Chin. Stud.* 1, 1–17. Available online at: <https://mjcs.newera.edu.my/journal/vol1/iss1/1/>
- Wiarda, H. J. (2013). *Culture and Foreign Policy: The Neglected Factor in International Relations, 1st Edn*. London: Routledge.
- Willigen, N. van (2020). Business diplomacy from an IR perspective. *Diplomatica* 2, 13–19. doi: 10.1163/25891774-00201002
- Wu, K. (2025). *BRI Railway to Better Link Malaysia*. China Daily. Available online at: <https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202504/17/WS68004063a3104d9fd381fcd0.html> (Accessed September 22, 2025).
- Wu, X. A. (2011). "Rice trade and Chinese rice millers in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries: the case of British Malaya," in *Chinese Circulations: Capital, Commodities, and Networks in Southeast Asia*, Eds. E. Tagliacozzo and W.-C. Chang (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 336–359.
- Xiao, T. (2025). *China-Malaysia Closer Economic Ties and Opportunities*. China Briefing. Available online at: [https://www.china-briefing.com/news/china-malaysia-closer-economic-ties-and-opportunities/#:\\\$sim\\\$text=Malaysia%20approved%20a%20total%20of,the%20manufacturing%20and%20services%20sectors](https://www.china-briefing.com/news/china-malaysia-closer-economic-ties-and-opportunities/#:\$sim\$text=Malaysia%20approved%20a%20total%20of,the%20manufacturing%20and%20services%20sectors) (Accessed September 24, 2025).
- Xuanmin, L., and Juecheng, Z. (2023). *BRI Fuels Infrastructure Build-up, Propelling Trans-border Shipment at Malaysia's Kuantan*. Global Times. Available online at: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202308/1296897.shtml> (Accessed July 5, 2025).
- Yen, C.-H. (2008). *The Chinese in Southeast Asia and Beyond: Socioeconomic and Political Dimensions*. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co. Pte. Ltd.
- Yiau, C. N. (2023). Malaysia-China Kuantan Industrial Park Drew RM31b in Investments, Created Over 14,000 Jobs, Says Deputy Miti Minister. *The Edge Malaysia*, November 6. Available online at: <https://theedgemalaysia.com/node/688976> (Accessed July 5, 2025).
- Yong, Y. (2017). *ACCCIM: China an Invaluable Strategic Partner*. The Edge Malaysia. Available online at: <https://theedgemalaysia.com/article/accim-china-invaluable-strategic-partner> (Accessed July 9, 2025).
- Zalkapli, A. (2008). *PM: Grow by 8pc or Malaysia Will Not Achieve Vision 2020*. The Malaysian Insider. Available online via Wayback Machine: <https://web.archive.org/web/20090829215304/http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/index.php/malaysia/36250-pm-grow-by-8pc-or-malaysia-will-not-achieve-vision-2020> (Accessed July 2, 2025).
- Zhao, K. (2019). The China model of public diplomacy and its future. *Hague J. Dipl.* 14, 169–181. doi: 10.1163/1871191X-14101033