

Strategic Alignment between the China-Malaysia Community with a Shared Future and the ASEAN Community Vision 2045

Penjajaran Strategik antara Komuniti Masa Depan Bersama China–Malaysia dan Wawasan Komuniti ASEAN 2045

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ABSTRACT

The strategic alignment between the China-Malaysia community with a shared future and the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 is an important issue where the upgrading of bilateral relations intersects with the deepening of ASEAN Community-building. Based on the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind, this paper proposes a Bilateral-Regional Nested Strategic Alignment Model and analyses how bilateral cooperation can be embedded in a regional long-term strategy from the value, functional and implementation dimensions. At the value dimension, the China-Malaysia community with a shared future is centred on political mutual trust, common development and regional cooperation, while the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 looks ahead to the next two decades and emphasises the building of a resilient, innovative, dynamic and people-centred ASEAN. The two are highly compatible. At the functional dimension, China and Malaysia enjoy strong political mutual trust, close trade and investment ties, significant industrial complementarity, mature regional mechanisms and a deep people-to-people foundation. Malaysia's hub role in ASEAN also provides important support for strategic alignment. At the implementation dimension, the two sides should strengthen institutional coordination, deepen economic, trade and industrial chain cooperation, advance connectivity, the digital economy, green development, people-to-people exchanges and non-traditional security cooperation, and improve risk management and public communication. Based on this study, the paper explores how the China-Malaysia community with a shared future can be better embedded in the process of the ASEAN Community Vision 2045, thereby providing a demonstrative practical model for China-ASEAN cooperation and common regional development.

Keywords: China-Malaysia community with a shared future; ASEAN Community Vision 2045; China-ASEAN relations; Regional cooperation; International Relations

ABSTRAK

Penjajaran strategik antara Komuniti Masa Depan Bersama China–Malaysia dengan Wawasan Komuniti ASEAN 2045 merupakan isu penting kerana ia menghubungkan peningkatan hubungan dua hala China–Malaysia dengan proses pengukuhan Komuniti ASEAN. Berasaskan konsep komuniti masa depan bersama untuk umat manusia, makalah ini mencadangkan Model Penjajaran Strategik Dua Hala–Serantau bagi menganalisis bagaimana kerjasama dua hala dapat diselaraskan dengan strategi jangka panjang serantau melalui dimensi nilai, fungsi dan pelaksanaan. Dari segi nilai, Komuniti Masa Depan Bersama China–Malaysia menekankan kepercayaan politik bersama, pembangunan bersama dan kerjasama serantau, manakala Wawasan Komuniti ASEAN 2045 menumpukan pembinaan ASEAN yang berdaya tahan, inovatif, dinamik dan berteraskan rakyat. Kedua-dua kerangka ini mempunyai keserasian yang jelas dari segi matlamat dan prinsip asas. Dari segi fungsi, China dan Malaysia memiliki asas kerjasama yang kukuh melalui kepercayaan politik, hubungan perdagangan dan pelaburan, saling pelengkapan industri, mekanisme serantau yang matang serta hubungan antara rakyat. Peranan Malaysia sebagai hab dalam ASEAN turut memperkukuh penjajaran ini. Dari segi pelaksanaan, kedua-dua pihak perlu memperkukuh penyelarasan institusi, kerjasama ekonomi dan rantaian industri, kesalinghubungan, ekonomi digital, pembangunan hijau, pertukaran antara rakyat serta keselamatan bukan tradisional. Kajian ini seterusnya meneliti bagaimana kerangka China–Malaysia tersebut dapat disepadukan dengan Wawasan Komuniti ASEAN 2045 sebagai model amalan bagi kerjasama China–ASEAN dan pembangunan bersama serantau.

Kata kunci: Komuniti Masa Depan Bersama China–Malaysia; Wawasan Komuniti ASEAN 2045; hubungan China–ASEAN; kerjasama serantau; hubungan antarabangsa.

INTRODUCTION

The Kuala Lumpur Declaration on ASEAN 2045: Our Shared Future, adopted in 2025, proposes that ASEAN realise a resilient, innovative, dynamic and people-centred ASEAN by 2045, while strengthening ASEAN's position as a centre of growth in the Indo-Pacific (ASEAN Secretariat, 2025). This vision responds not only to practical issues within ASEAN, including uneven development, industrial upgrading, green transition and digital governance, but also to ASEAN's efforts to maintain strategic autonomy amid intensifying major-power competition, global supply chain restructuring and rising regional security risks (Sahakian, 2021). For China and Malaysia, how to understand bilateral cooperation within ASEAN's long-term development framework has become an important issue of both theoretical value and practical significance.

China-Malaysia relations have long maintained a high degree of stability and pragmatism. The two countries have built a solid foundation for cooperation in trade and investment, infrastructure, industrial and supply chains, people-to-people exchanges and regional affairs (Ku & Tan, 2021). Since 2023, China and Malaysia have reached important consensus on building a China-Malaysia community with a shared future. In 2025, the two countries further proposed building a high-level strategic China-Malaysia community with a shared future, stressing joint efforts to advance modernisation and promote regional and global prosperity and stability. This means that China-Malaysia cooperation has moved beyond a general bilateral relationship arrangement and has begun to assume more functions in regional governance, development coordination and South-South cooperation. It serves the development of both countries and may also provide a more demonstrative model of cooperation for China-ASEAN relations.

METHODOLOGY

From the theoretical perspective of strategic alignment, the issue commonly engages with international relations theory, regional integration theory, development cooperation theory and global governance theory. However, there remains a lack of theoretical models for explaining how bilateral cooperation can be embedded in long-term regional strategies. The Bilateral-Regional Nested Strategic Alignment Model proposed in this paper, guided by the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind and integrating the above theories, systematically explains how bilateral cooperation can be embedded in a regional long-term strategy at three levels: the value dimension, the functional dimension and the implementation dimension. The model clarifies a three-level logic: at the value dimension, it aligns the China-Malaysia community with a shared future with the ASEAN Community Vision 2045; at the functional dimension, it promotes the provision of regional public goods through bilateral cooperation; and at the implementation dimension, it explores pathways for strategic linkage among China, Malaysia and ASEAN. The model aims to reveal how a bilateral community with a shared future can realise mutual empowerment between bilateral cooperation and a regional vision through conceptual alignment, functional complementarity and practical linkage, thereby providing a replicable theoretical paradigm for implementing the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind in Southeast Asia.

On this basis, the paper analyses the issue from the value, functional and implementation dimensions. It first sorts out the internal connection between the concept of a community with a shared future and ASEAN Community-building, then examines the functional positioning of China-Malaysia cooperation in ASEAN's regional agenda and finally proposes specific directions for strategic alignment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

THE VALUE DIMENSION OF STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT BETWEEN THE CHINA-MALAYSIA COMMUNITY WITH A SHARED FUTURE AND THE ASEAN COMMUNITY VISION 2045

The core of strategic alignment between the China-Malaysia community with a shared future and the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 lies in how China and Malaysia can connect the upgrading of bilateral relations with ASEAN's long-term Community-building through stable, sustained and institutionalised cooperation. At the same time, it also concerns how the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 can provide a broader regional field and institutional space for the China-Malaysia community with a shared future.

Accordingly, this paper conceptualises the value dimension of strategic alignment in terms of three relationships. The first is conceptual alignment, meaning that the concept of a community with a shared future and ASEAN's vision of "our shared future" share common values in peace, development, inclusiveness and cooperation. The second is functional complementarity, meaning that China-Malaysia bilateral cooperation can provide project support and practical models for ASEAN Community-building, while the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 can enhance the regional significance of China-Malaysia cooperation. The third is institutional embedding, meaning that China-Malaysia cooperation needs to achieve stable linkage through ASEAN-led mechanisms, regional multilateral platforms and specific sectoral rules. Seen through this framework, the strategic alignment between the China-Malaysia community with a shared future and the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 is a systematic connection among ideas, interests, institutions and actions.

TABLE 1. Interpretation of the Core Concepts of Malaysia Madani

MADANI	English Translation (SCRIPT)	Description
Kemampanan	Sustainability (S)	Economic, social, and environmental balanced development; ensures intergenerational equity.
Kesejahteraan	Prosperity (P)	Inclusive economic welfare, social justice, and improvement of quality of life for all citizens.
Daya Cipta	Innovation (I)	Stimulating human capital creativity; promoting technological innovation, industrial upgrading, and digital transformation.
Hormat	Respect (R)	Respecting ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity; maintaining social inclusivity and harmony.
Keyakinan	Trust (T)	Rebuilding government credibility, social trust, and international reputation; advocating clean and efficient governance.
Ihsan	Compassion / Care (C)	People-centered approach; alleviating poverty, empowering vulnerable groups, and practicing social responsibility.

Source: <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2023/01/20/madani---a-humane-concept>

Conceptual alignment forms the basis of the value dimension. Conceptually, the China-Malaysia community with a shared future is highly compatible with the Malaysia MADANI concept. MADANI is formed from the initials of six Malay core words, with the English abbreviation SCRIPT (Table 1). The Malaysia MADANI concept is centred on people-centred governance, multicultural inclusiveness, good and clean governance, innovation and sustainability, and social harmony. It takes into account both domestic modernisation and regional strategic integration, providing a theoretical basis for Malaysia's domestic governance and bilateral

cooperation (Ushama, 2025). The China-Malaysia community with a shared future upholds strategic autonomy, seeks common development, enhances candour and mutual trust, safeguards fairness and justice, deepens mutually beneficial cooperation and promotes people-to-people bonds. The two are highly compatible in values, development goals, governance logic and regional positions (Noor, 2024).

The ASEAN Community Vision 2045: ASEAN 2045: Our Shared Future, officially released through the Kuala Lumpur Declaration adopted at the 46th ASEAN Summit in May 2025, is ASEAN's long-term strategic blueprint for the next 20 years after the 2025 Vision, covering the period from 2025 to 2045. Its core positioning is to build a resilient, innovative, dynamic and people-centred ASEAN, with the goals of becoming a centre of growth in the Indo-Pacific and the world's fourth-largest economy. The focus of this vision is to build such an ASEAN Community over the next two decades. It continues ASEAN's long-standing logic of Community-building and also responds to new issues such as geopolitical competition, supply chain restructuring, digital transformation, climate change and development gaps. From this perspective, the China-Malaysia community with a shared future and the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 have a clear alignment of goals. Both emphasise peace and stability. Both attach importance to development cooperation. Both also place regional prosperity and people's well-being in an important position.

Functional complementarity is another component of the value dimension. From the perspective of international relations theory, strategic alignment between the China-Malaysia community with a shared future and the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 can be analysed within a complementary framework of interdependence and cooperative security. Traditional realism emphasises national interests and power competition, but in Southeast Asia, reliance on balance of power alone cannot explain the long-term development of China-ASEAN cooperation (Wang et al., 2017). Economic and trade exchanges, industrial collaboration, infrastructure development and people-to-people exchanges between China and Malaysia have already formed a strong pattern of complex interdependence. Malaysia needs China's market, capital, technology and industrial chain coordination, while China also needs to deepen connectivity, regional cooperation and maritime cooperation with ASEAN through Malaysia (Liu & Lim, 2018). In such a relationship, the more concrete the benefits of cooperation are, the higher the costs of conflict become, and the stronger the motivation for both sides to manage differences and expand consensus through institutional communication and policy coordination.

From the perspective of global governance theory, strategic alignment also reflects the logic of providing regional public goods. Southeast Asia faces many transnational issues, including climate change, energy transition, public health, cybersecurity, cross-border crime, maritime passage security and supply chain stability. No single country can address these issues alone. The ASEAN Community Vision 2045 emphasises improving institutional capacity and coordination efficiency and calls for the mobilisation of member states and external resources to jointly implement relevant goals. If the China-Malaysia community with a shared future can provide stable cooperation in such fields as green and low-carbon development, digital governance, maritime cooperation, disaster management and infrastructure connectivity, it can be transformed into public goods for the wider region (Goh et al., 2024).

Institutional embedding is also central to the value dimension. From the perspective of regional integration theory, the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 itself reflects the deepening trend of regional Community-building, while the China-Malaysia community with a shared future need to integrate into regional Community-building through institutional embedding. Regional integration includes not only tariff reduction and trade facilitation, but also industrial chain

coordination, infrastructure connectivity, rules coordination, mobility of people and the construction of identity (Cuyvers et al., 2019). Malaysia needs to be institutionally embedded in ASEAN's Political-Security Community, Economic Community and Socio-Cultural Community, and the 2045 Vision continues and expands this structure. The alignment of the China-Malaysia community with a shared future with this vision can therefore be understood through these three pillars. At the political-security level, China-Malaysia cooperation helps maintain regional stability and multilateral dialogue. At the economic level, the two countries can promote trade and investment, the digital economy, green industries and supply chain cooperation. At the socio-cultural level, education, tourism, youth exchanges and mutual learning among civilisations can strengthen the cognitive foundation among the people.

At the same time, from the perspective of development cooperation theory, both the China-Malaysia community with a shared future and the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 emphasise modernisation and inclusive growth. There is no single template for the modernisation of developing countries, and ASEAN countries vary significantly in development level, industrial structure and governance capacity. The cooperative model of the China-Malaysia community with a shared future can provide an institutional case for ASEAN-building. As an important ASEAN member, Malaysia has a special position in connecting China and ASEAN. It is an important node in regional manufacturing, the digital economy and the halal industry, and it is also an important force within ASEAN in promoting rules coordination, economic cooperation and South-South cooperation (Jiang & Husin, 2024). Based on common development, the China-Malaysia community with a shared future can place the experience of Chinese modernisation, the Malaysia MADANI concept and the goals of ASEAN Community-building within the same analytical framework. Although the three differ in origin and expression, they all concern how development opportunities can be expanded, how social outcomes can be shared, and how national modernisation can be coordinated with regional stability.

Of course, theoretical alignment does not mean that the two frameworks fully overlap. The China-Malaysia community with a shared future is a bilateral cooperation framework, while the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 is a regional Community blueprint. The former places greater emphasis on strategic mutual trust and pragmatic cooperation between China and Malaysia, while the latter places greater emphasis on ASEAN's internal integration and overall regional development. This difference is precisely what makes strategic alignment necessary. Only by clarifying the differences in level, function and institutional boundaries between the two can bilateral cooperation be prevented from being simply equated with a regional strategy, and a regional vision from being understood as an empty slogan. A more reasonable understanding is that the China-Malaysia community with a shared future can become an important implementation anchor at the bilateral level for the ASEAN Community Vision 2045, while the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 provides directional guidance, agenda space and regional legitimacy for China-Malaysia cooperation.

THE FUNCTIONAL DIMENSION OF STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT BETWEEN THE CHINA-MALAYSIA COMMUNITY WITH A SHARED FUTURE AND THE ASEAN COMMUNITY VISION 2045

At the functional dimension, strategic alignment between the China-Malaysia community with a shared future and the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 means transforming the outcomes of bilateral cooperation into the provision of regional public goods, so that ASEAN can share the benefits of China-Malaysia cooperation. The ASEAN Community Vision 2045 proposes six priority areas: sustainable infrastructure and connectivity; digital innovation and Smart ASEAN;

green and low-carbon development and climate resilience; supply chain stability and economic inclusion; good governance, rules coordination and institutional effectiveness; and people-to-people exchanges and social cohesion. These six areas create important demands for strategic alignment.

Good governance, rules coordination and institutional effectiveness provide a key bridge at the functional dimension of strategic alignment. Malaysia, as an important bridge for aligning the China-Malaysia community with a shared future with the ASEAN Community Vision 2045, itself plays an important role in ASEAN. Malaysia is one of ASEAN's founding members and a country within ASEAN that combines economic vitality, institutional experience and geographical advantages. Located at the intersection of maritime and land routes in Southeast Asia, it connects the Strait of Malacca, the South China Sea and the wider Indo-Pacific region, and has strong hub significance in regional supply chains, energy corridors, maritime trade and links with the Muslim world (Chin, 2023). Malaysia's role as ASEAN Chair in 2025 gave it a more prominent agenda-shaping role in the formation of ASEAN's long-term vision (Mazlan, 2025).

Supply chain stability and economic inclusion provide the economic foundation at the functional dimension of strategic alignment. Economic and trade cooperation is the most solid foundation in practice for aligning the China-Malaysia community with a shared future with the ASEAN Community Vision 2045. China has long been an important trading partner of Malaysia, and Malaysia is also an important economic and trade cooperation partner for China within ASEAN. The two countries have formed close industrial and supply chain links, with cooperation covering electrical and electronics, machinery and equipment, petrochemicals, palm oil, the halal industry, cross-border e-commerce, digital services, new energy and other fields. This economic and trade relationship has two features. One is its large scale. The other is its deep embeddedness. It is reflected not only in goods trade and investment figures, but also in the continuous connection among corporate networks, industrial supporting systems, logistics systems and market rules.

The ASEAN Community Vision 2045 emphasises enhancing regional economic resilience, deepening regional integration and promoting innovation-led growth. China-Malaysia economic and trade cooperation can respond to these goals at the levels of industrial chain stability, market opening and the cultivation of emerging industries. During Chinese Premier Li Qiang's visit to Kuala Lumpur in 2025, he also stressed the expansion of trade and investment cooperation and placed such cooperation in the context of maintaining free trade and multilateral trade. This shows that China-Malaysia economic and trade cooperation already carries clear significance for regional economic governance.

Sustainable infrastructure and connectivity cooperation provide tangible support at the functional dimension of strategic alignment. The deepening of the ASEAN Community under the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 cannot be achieved without the continued improvement of infrastructure in transport, ports, energy, communications and cross-border logistics. Malaysia has a special position in ASEAN's connectivity system. On the one hand, it faces the South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca; on the other hand, it connects the Indochina Peninsula, the Indonesian archipelago and the broader regional market. China and Malaysia have accumulated cooperation experience in railways, ports, industrial parks and logistics networks, some of which already have regional connectivity functions. The significance of infrastructure cooperation lies not only in building projects. More importantly, it reduces regional transaction costs, improves conditions for industrial distribution, and enables the smoother flow of capital, technology, people and information (Lim et al., 2022). If these projects can be linked with the ASEAN Master Plan on Connectivity, regional supply chain development and green infrastructure standards, China-

Malaysia cooperation can provide visible, practical and sustainable support for the ASEAN Community Vision 2045.

Digital innovation and Smart ASEAN serve as technological enablers at the functional dimension of strategic alignment. ASEAN's competitiveness over the next two decades will depend to a large extent on whether it can move from traditional manufacturing, resource processing and low-cost advantages toward a growth model with higher added value, stronger innovation capacity and greener development (Yang & Li, 2024). Malaysia itself has a strong manufacturing foundation and certain advantages in semiconductors, electrical and electronics, data centres, the halal economy and modern services. China, for its part, has a complete industrial system, a super-large market, digital platform capacity and advantages in new energy industries. If the two countries deepen cooperation in the digital economy, artificial intelligence, green technologies, smart manufacturing and cross-border e-commerce, they can transform bilateral industrial coordination into part of ASEAN's regional industrial upgrading. The scope for cooperation is vast. It is also highly feasible. The ASEAN Community Vision 2045 emphasises innovation and dynamism, while the China-Malaysia community with a shared future can make the innovation agenda more concrete through business cooperation, industrial park development, talent training and standards alignment, preventing the vision from remaining only at the level of principle.

Green and low-carbon development and climate resilience provide a responsibility-oriented direction at the functional dimension of strategic alignment. Green development also offers a new growth point for alignment between the two. Climate change, energy security and ecological protection have become issues that ASEAN must address in its long-term development (Osabohien et al., 2024). Southeast Asian countries generally need to strike a balance among economic growth, energy transition and ecological resilience, and Malaysia is also promoting renewable energy, electric vehicles, green finance and low-carbon industrial development. China has built strong industrial capacity in solar energy, wind power, batteries, electric vehicles and green infrastructure development, while China and Malaysia are complementary in green industries. If the two sides can cooperate on green investment, low-carbon industrial parks, renewable energy projects, green finance rules and environmental governance capacity-building, they can connect the building of the China-Malaysia community with a shared future with the sustainable development goals in the ASEAN Community Vision 2045. Green cooperation also has a practical advantage: it is less likely to be shaped by ideological disputes and is more likely to produce tangible outcomes for enterprises, local governments and the general public (Yean, 2024).

People-to-people exchanges and social cohesion provide a public support base at the functional dimension of strategic alignment. People-to-people exchanges and the social foundation cannot be overlooked. The stability of China-Malaysia relations depends not only on intergovernmental cooperation, but also on long-term interaction at the societal level. China and Malaysia have conducted dialogue and built trust through cultural exchange platforms such as Confucius Institutes, providing a sound foundation for the China-Malaysia community with a shared future (Tien & Bing, 2021). The Chinese community in Malaysia, educational exchanges between the two countries, tourism flows, youth exchanges, media cooperation and local cooperation all provide a strong social foundation for the China-Malaysia community with a shared future (Wang & Liang, 2024).

Second, the maturity of regional mechanisms also provides an institutional foundation for strategic alignment. China and ASEAN have established a relatively complete dialogue and cooperation system, including the China-ASEAN Leaders' Meeting, the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area, ASEAN Plus Three cooperation, the East Asia Summit and the ASEAN Regional Forum. Malaysia is both an important participant in these mechanisms and an important member in promoting coordination within ASEAN.

Third, changes in the external environment further highlight the necessity of strategic alignment. The current international system is undergoing deep adjustment, with major-power competition, protectionism, supply chain restructuring, energy market volatility and geopolitical conflicts intertwined. Southeast Asian countries generally hope to maintain strategic autonomy and development space in a complex environment. Both Malaysia and ASEAN attach importance to open regionalism and hope to prevent regional cooperation from being pulled by bloc-based logic. It is in this environment that the alignment between the China-Malaysia community with a shared future and the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 demonstrates its practical significance.

Of course, real-world conditions include not only favourable factors, but also complex variables that need to be addressed. The South China Sea issue, the involvement of external forces, sensitivities among regional countries regarding economic dependence, project sustainability, debt risks, differences in rules and changes in domestic politics may all affect the stable advancement of strategic alignment. For China-Malaysia cooperation to play a positive role under the framework of the ASEAN Community Vision 2045, it must uphold consultation on an equal footing, transparent cooperation and sustainable advancement, with particular respect for ASEAN centrality and Malaysia's own development strategy. Only in this way can external doubts be reduced and consensus on cooperation be expanded. For China and Malaysia, strategic alignment with real vitality must withstand domestic political cycles, fluctuations in the international situation and shifts in regional public opinion and must continuously consolidate mutual trust through concrete outcomes.

THE IMPLEMENTATION DIMENSION OF STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT BETWEEN THE CHINA-MALAYSIA COMMUNITY WITH A SHARED FUTURE AND THE ASEAN COMMUNITY VISION 2045

The key to strategic alignment between the China-Malaysia community with a shared future and the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 lies in transforming shared ideas into stable mechanisms and translating macro-level consensus into specific fields. A vision needs project support. Cooperation needs institutional support. China and Malaysia already have sound political mutual trust, an economic and trade foundation and social ties. The next step should focus on the goals emphasised by the ASEAN Community Vision 2045, namely resilience, innovation, dynamism, inclusiveness and people-centred development. The two sides should promote a shift in bilateral cooperation from single-track advancement to systematic planning, and extend cooperation from traditional economic and trade fields to broader areas such as regional governance, industrial upgrading, green transition and people-to-people bonds. Only in this way can the building of the China-Malaysia community with a shared future be better embedded in the long-term process of ASEAN Community-building, and the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 gain more concrete and sustainable vehicles for implementation.

Institutional linkage should serve as the starting point for strategic alignment. For China-Malaysia cooperation to serve the ASEAN Community Vision 2045, smoother connections must be established between bilateral mechanisms and regional mechanisms. The two countries can rely on intergovernmental joint committees, diplomatic consultations, economic and trade joint committees, local cooperation mechanisms and multilateral platforms under the China-ASEAN framework to form a multi-level communication network (Bi, 2021). This network needs to address three questions: whether policy objectives are consistent, whether cooperation projects support one another, and whether implementation can be consistently monitored. Specifically, China and Malaysia can establish an annual alignment list around the key agenda of the ASEAN Community Vision 2045, incorporate political-security issues, economic integration, the digital economy, green development, connectivity and socio-cultural exchanges into fixed agenda items, and regularly evaluate project progress. The more stable the mechanisms are, the stronger the expectations for cooperation will be. The clearer the issues are, the easier implementation will become. For Malaysia, this will help coordinate its national development strategy, ASEAN Community-building goals and cooperation arrangements with China. For China, it will also help it participate in ASEAN regional cooperation in a more detailed and transparent way, reduce external misinterpretation and enhance the institutional credibility of cooperation.

Economic and trade cooperation remains the core pillar of the implementation pathway. China and Malaysia should further improve the quality of cooperation on the basis of traditional trade and investment. In the past, cooperation focused more on goods trade, resource products, manufacturing investment and infrastructure development. These areas remain important, but future cooperation needs to extend further toward high value-added industries, trade in services, digital trade and regional supply chain coordination. The two countries can promote closer industrial linkages in electrical and electronics, semiconductors, auto parts, petrochemicals, the halal industry, modern agriculture, cross-border e-commerce and financial services. Malaysia has a strong manufacturing foundation and access to the ASEAN market, while China has a complete industrial system, a super-large market and strong technological application capacity. If the two sides can combine industrial chain cooperation with the restructuring of ASEAN regional value chains, they can jointly enhance the resilience and competitiveness of the ASEAN economy (Ruan et al., 2023).

Particular attention should be paid to small and medium-sized enterprises. Large projects can create a demonstration effect, while SMEs are better able to drive employment, innovation and local economic vitality. China and Malaysia can establish digital trade platforms, financing facilitation arrangements and market information service systems for SMEs, enabling more enterprises to participate in the inclusive growth advocated by the ASEAN Community Vision 2045.

Connectivity cooperation needs to move from hard connectivity toward soft connectivity and heart-to-heart connectivity. Transport, ports, railways, industrial parks and logistics corridors remain important areas of China-Malaysia cooperation. These projects can reduce transaction costs, improve conditions for regional mobility and help Malaysia better play its role as an ASEAN hub. But infrastructure alone is not enough. After corridors are built, whether connectivity can truly release economic benefits depends on improving customs clearance efficiency, refining logistics standards, strengthening cross-border payments, promoting mutual recognition of customs data and facilitating the movement of people. Therefore, China and Malaysia should combine infrastructure development with institutional facilitation and connect ports, railways, industrial parks and digital logistics platforms into an integrated system. They may consider

advancing single window cooperation at key ports, industrial parks and cross-border e-commerce nodes, and explore smart customs, green customs clearance and cross-border supply chain finance services. Such cooperation is closer to the needs of enterprises and more in line with the ASEAN Community Vision 2045's expectations for an efficient, open and resilient regional network.

As a flagship connectivity project between China and Malaysia, the ECRL delivers multi-layered economic benefits to the east coast (CIDB, 2023). It cuts logistics costs by around 35% for agricultural and manufactured goods, connects Kuantan Port and Port Klang to build a peninsula land bridge, and diverts nearly 30% road freight to strengthen supply chain resilience. During construction, it created over 100,000 local jobs and boosted demand for construction, engineering and supporting SMEs. Railway stations drive new urban hubs, industrial parks and property investment across Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan, curbing youth out-migration. Meanwhile, faster passenger transport stimulates coastal tourism and local service sectors. In the long run, the railway will lift regional GDP growth, cut annual carbon emissions by 1.2 million tonnes, and serve as a tangible practical case for bilateral-regional strategic alignment under the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 (Bernama, 2024). The ultimate goal of connectivity is to make goods flow faster, reduce business costs, facilitate people-to-people exchanges and truly connect the regional market into a more dynamic whole.

The digital economy should become a new growth pole for China-Malaysia strategic alignment. ASEAN's development over the next two decades will depend to a large extent on whether it can seize the opportunities of digital and intelligent transformation. Malaysia is developing data centres, digital finance, e-commerce, smart cities and digital public services, while China has strong experience in digital platforms, mobile payments, artificial intelligence applications, cloud computing and smart logistics. China and Malaysia can carry out systematic cooperation around digital infrastructure, data governance, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence applications and digital talent development. Cooperation should not remain only at the level of enterprise investment; it should also emphasise rules alignment and capacity-building. For example, the two sides can strengthen exchanges on digital trade standards, promote regulatory cooperation in cross-border e-commerce, support universities and enterprises in jointly building digital skills training programmes, and encourage youth entrepreneurial teams to participate in application scenarios such as smart agriculture, smart tourism, smart manufacturing and digital healthcare. Digital cooperation produces results quickly and has a broad reach. It can bring the building of the China-Malaysia community with a shared future closer to the lives of ordinary people and provide concrete support for the goal of an innovative community in the ASEAN Community Vision 2045.

Green development is an important direction for aligning the China-Malaysia community with a shared future with the ASEAN Community Vision 2045. Climate change, energy transition and ecological protection have become long-term issues jointly faced by ASEAN countries. China and Malaysia should give greater prominence to green cooperation and promote project clusters in renewable energy, electric vehicles, power batteries, green buildings, low-carbon industrial parks, green finance and ecological protection. Malaysia has potential in developing green energy and regional green industrial chains, while China has advantages in new energy equipment, green manufacturing and low-carbon technology applications. The two sides can support enterprises in cooperating on solar energy, energy storage, electric vehicle parts and green transport, and they can also strengthen exchanges on green standards, carbon footprint management and environmental impact assessment. Green cooperation should avoid a single-minded pursuit of investment scale. What matters more is project quality, environmental benefits and community

acceptance. Only when green projects truly bring employment, technology transfer and ecological improvement can they gain more stable social support and form a deep connection with the sustainable development goals emphasised by the ASEAN Community Vision 2045.

People-to-people exchanges are the social foundation for the long-term continuity of strategic alignment. China-Malaysia relations have unique people-to-people advantages, and the two countries have a deep foundation in education, culture, tourism and civil exchanges. China-Malaysia people-to-people exchanges should be based on the theory of a community with a shared future for mankind, and academic cooperation and student exchanges between universities should be carried out through research institutions such as institutes for the study of a community with a shared future for mankind. Vocational education can be made more pragmatic. Youth exchanges can be made more regular (Wang et al., 2026). The two countries can establish youth leadership programmes, joint research projects and vocational skills training programmes oriented toward the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 agenda, encouraging students, teachers, media professionals, local government personnel and young business leaders to participate in exchanges. Tourism cooperation can also be linked with cultural industries, city branding, media cooperation and local economies, encouraging more direct connections among second- and third-tier cities (Wang et al., 2025). People-to-people bonds are not a slogan. They require activities that people can participate in, platforms that can be sustained and visible benefits. When more ordinary people feel the real opportunities brought by China-Malaysia cooperation through study, employment, tourism, entrepreneurship and cultural exchange, the social foundation of the China-Malaysia community with a shared future will become more solid.

Local cooperation and industrial park development can become important vehicles in the implementation pathway. Strategic alignment at the national level needs to be carried by local governments and enterprises, especially in industrial implementation, project operation and social services, where local governments are often closer to practical needs. China and Malaysia can encourage province-state cooperation, city-to-city cooperation and industrial park cooperation, and build a number of demonstration projects around manufacturing upgrading, the halal industry, modern agriculture, smart cities, green energy and the cultural and tourism economy. Industrial parks are particularly suitable as comprehensive cooperation platforms because they can bring together infrastructure, enterprise investment, technical services, talent training, financial support and local governance (China Communications Construction Company, 2025). If China and Malaysia can further improve operating standards on the basis of existing industrial park cooperation and introduce more local SMEs and innovative enterprises, they can strengthen the local embeddedness of projects and make cooperation outcomes more easily transformed into employment, tax revenue and industrial capacity. When local cooperation is carried out solidly, strategic alignment will have firm roots.

Security and governance cooperation should also be incorporated into the implementation pathway. The ASEAN Community Vision 2045 emphasises building a peaceful, secure and resilient community, and China-Malaysia cooperation also needs to respond to regional security and non-traditional security challenges. The two sides can strengthen coordination in maritime search and rescue, disaster management, public health, combating transnational crime, cybersecurity, food security and energy security. In the field of non-traditional security in particular, there is considerable room for cooperation, political sensitivity is relatively low and practical outcomes are easier to produce. China and Malaysia can promote joint training, information sharing, emergency drills and capacity-building projects, and expand the impact of cooperation through relevant ASEAN mechanisms. Maritime cooperation should adhere to

dialogue, consultation and crisis management, properly handle sensitive issues and ensure that the cooperation agenda always serves regional peace and stability. The value of security cooperation lies in reducing uncertainty. The more controllable the risks are, the more secure development cooperation will be. The more stable the region is, the better the conditions for achieving the ASEAN Community Vision 2045's long-term goals.

In advancing strategic alignment, risk management and public communication should also receive attention. Any large-scale cooperation may face issues such as project financing, environmental impact, labour rights, community acceptance, differences in rules and external public opinion. If these issues are not handled properly, problems in individual projects may be amplified into doubts about overall cooperation. Therefore, China and Malaysia should improve the transparency of cooperation, refine project evaluation mechanisms, attach importance to local social concerns and encourage enterprises to fulfil their social responsibilities. For projects involving infrastructure, resource development and industrial parks, environmental assessment, debt sustainability analysis and community communication should be strengthened. For the digital economy and data cooperation, attention should be paid to privacy protection, cybersecurity and regulatory compliance. Sound risk management is itself part of strategic alignment. It can improve the quality of cooperation and strengthen the credibility of the China-Malaysia community with a shared future within the ASEAN region.

CONCLUSION

This paper constructs a Bilateral-Regional Nested Strategic Alignment Model to systematically interpret the coordination logic between the China-Malaysia community with a shared future and ASEAN Community Vision 2045 from value, functional and implementation dimensions. In value terms, the two frameworks share consistent pursuits of peace, inclusive development and people-centred governance, with the Malaysia MADANI concept further bridging their value compatibility. Functionally, Malaysia's hub position in ASEAN, deep industrial interdependence between China and Malaysia, and joint demands for regional public goods such as digital economy and green development lay solid foundations for strategic linkage. Practically, institutional coordination, industrial chain cooperation, connectivity, digital and green collaboration, people-to-people exchanges and risk governance form a complete implementation path.

While challenges including geopolitical interference and domestic policy shifts persist, the bilateral-regional alignment model offers a replicable paradigm for integrating bilateral partnership into regional long-term strategies. By advancing pragmatic, inclusive and sustainable cooperation, the China-Malaysia community with a shared future can serve as a demonstration case for China-ASEAN ties, helping ASEAN realise its 2045 vision of a resilient, innovative and dynamic regional community and advance common regional prosperity.

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