

THE RISE OF CHINA AND HIGH-SPEED POLITICS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA:
THAILAND'S RAILWAY DEVELOPMENT IN COMPARATIVE PERSPETIVE

Trin Aiyara

National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies

SUMMARY

The primary aim of this dissertation is to examine characteristics of the high-speed railway projects in Southeast Asian countries between 2010 and 2018 and China's involvement in the projects. The thesis argues that trajectories of railway development in the host countries (Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Laos) were shaped by not only negotiations between China and host governments but also contestation among interest groups, both domestic and foreign, over potential economic rents in the projects. Based on data from various sources, including in-depth interviews, primary documents, and secondary studies, the thesis reveals that China's initiative regarding the export of high-speed railway technologies has become part of the domestic politics of Southeast Asian states.

The dissertation argues that ruling governments, whose legitimacy is based on an election result, have to encourage China to maintain or assist policies that distribute economic rents to a broad base of supporters. In contrast, authoritarian governments, whose stability relies on the support of the elite, usually utilize China's resources to enrich their elitist supporting coalition and Chinese agencies, which provide additional resources via the generation of potential rents, since the governments do not have to accommodate the demands of a broad base of voters.