



UKM-QMUL WORKSHOP

Asymmetry and Authority: ASEAN States' Responses to China's Belt and Road Initiative

A Newton Advanced Fellowship Project

29-30 April 2017

Le Meridien, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Project Overview & Workshop Program

This workshop is the first of two research meetings under a “Newton Advanced Fellowship” project, jointly managed by Cheng-Chwee Kuik at UKM (as Principal Investigator) and Lee Jones at QMUL (as Co-Investigator). The project is co-funded by the British Academy and the Academy of Sciences Malaysia. The two-year project (March 2016 – February 2018) is a study of China’s “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI) and Southeast Asian states’ responses to it. It aims to generate a co-edited book to be published by a university press.

The project’s goals are twofold. First, it seeks to explain why China launched the BRI – a vast program of economic inducement – at the same time as it ramped up its “assertiveness” in territorial disputes, notably the South China Sea.

Secondly, the project seeks to explain *how* and *why* the similarly situated, smaller states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are responding *differently* to China’s BRI in the context of growing Chinese ambition, assertiveness, and power. Our hypothesis is as follows. Since asymmetrical power relations are a given external condition for all regional countries, this alone cannot explain their response. Rather, it is ruling elites’ calculations about the costs, benefits, and risk-opportunity trade-offs of engaging with BRI with respect to their domestic constituencies that determines states’ responses. ASEAN’s ruling elites are primarily concerned to bolster their internal authority – their capacity, command, and perceived right to rule. To the extent where engagement with China provides material, coercive, or ideational resources that bolster elite strategies of rule, governments will welcome the BRI, and vice-versa; and many regimes will be forced to make complex trade-offs between competing opportunities and risks, generating intermediate positions along a spectrum of receptivity and resistance. Put differently, it is the ongoing dynamic of *managing (and leveraging on) external power asymmetry for internal political authority* that drives, limits, and shapes the manners in which individual states respond to their neighboring giant’s initiatives.

This first workshop brings together the project leaders, the researchers covering each of the Southeast Asian countries, expert discussants, as well as established and aspiring scholars for in-depth exchanges on:

- 1) The Project Framework, which outlines the proposed theoretical approach for this project and forms the first draft of the edited volume's first chapter. We invite all participants to discuss the utility and applicability of this framework, allowing the project leaders to refine and improve it. Agreeing a framework that all researchers will use to guide their research, and structure their empirical chapters, is crucial to ensuring the coherence of the book project;
- 2) The preliminary findings for each country. Each researcher will circulate and present a brief paper (minimum 4,000 words) on their country studies. The empirical analysis should be structured around the framework outlined in the project Concept Paper circulated in November 2016 (attached). In-depth discussion will share and compare findings, identify areas for further research, and ensure that all researchers are deploying the common theoretical framework. Researchers will then conduct further work to enable the presentation of a fully-developed (8,000 word) draft chapter at our second workshop in late 2017.

For the purpose of stimulating more structured discussion and more focused comparison at the April workshop, the 10 country-cases will be grouped under three thematic sessions: “*the relatively receptive states*”, “*the (self-)restrained embracers*”, and “*the more cautious or once skeptical states*”. These descriptive labels and categorizations are neither absolute nor static; rather, they are meant primarily for inviting critical observations and systematic comparisons. They are aimed at encouraging all researchers to address: *in what ways, to what extent*, and – especially – *for what reasons* have some Southeast Asian states responded to BRI in a more receptive/ more restrained/ more reluctant manner than others? What kinds of inter-state cooperation and infrastructure projects have thus far been initiated, negotiated, and/or implemented by the individual ASEAN state and China? In what domain, to what scope, and at what level have the cooperative processes been forged? Why have ruling elites engaged in the way they have? What are their calculations about the impact of engagement with the BRI on the material, coercive, and ideational resources needed to sustain their regimes? How have elites from different political groupings, and other domestic actors, like business groups and non-governmental organizations, responded? What are the main focal points of domestic debates, if any, on these issues? Which are the key controversies, barriers, or stakes involved? Why have some actors changed or adjusted their previous stance? What motivates and constrains the governing elites' attitudes and eventual choices?

This is a **by-invitation-only event.**

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| E: cckuik@gmail.com

PROGRAM

28 April 2017, Friday

Participants arriving KL

1830 Welcoming Dinner

29 April 2017, Saturday

0900-0930 Registration and Coffee

0930-1010 SESSION I

Moderator: Prof. Dato' Dr. ZAKARIA Haji Ahmad

Distinguished Fellow, Malaysian Armed Forces Defense College (MPAT) & Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations (IDFR)/ Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research), HELP University Malaysia

PROJECT OVERVIEW & FRAMEWORK:

“Beyond Belt and Road: Explaining China’s Contradictory Rise and Southeast Asian Responses”

- **Dr. KUIK Cheng-Chwee (UKM) & Dr. Lee JONES (QMUL), Project Leaders**

1010-1030 Discussant: Prof. KHONG Yuen Foong

Li Ka Shing Professor of Political Science, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore

1030-1100 Group photograph followed by coffee/tea

1100-1200 **Discussion of Project Framework**

1200-1245 Lunch

1245-1345 SESSION II: “The Relatively Receptive States”

Moderator: Dr. Johan SARAVANAMUTTU

Adjunct Senior Fellow, Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University

Cambodia: Dr. Vannarith CHHEANG

Chairman, Cambodian Institute for Strategic Studies

Laos: Dr. Phouphet KYOPHILAVONG

Associate Professor and Deputy Dean, Faculty of Economics and Business Management, National University of Laos

Malaysia: **Dr. KUIK Cheng-Chwee**
*Associate Professor, East Asian International Relations (EAIR)
Caucus, National University of Malaysia*

Singapore: **Ms. Irene CHAN**
*Associate Research Fellow, Rajaratnam School of International
Studies, Nanyang Technological University*

1345-1405 **Discussant: Dr. Shahar HAMEIRI**
*Associate Professor, School of Political Science and International
Studies, University of Queensland*

1405-1505 **Discussion**

1505-1530 Coffee Break

1530-1600 **SESSION III: “The More Cautious or Once Skeptical States”**

Moderator: Tan Sri Datuk Dr. KAMAL Salih
*Adjunct Professor, Faculty of Economics and Administration,
University of Malaya*

Vietnam: **Dr. PHAM Sy Thanh**
*Director, Chinese Economic Studies Program, Vietnam National
University*

The Philippines: **Prof. Aileen BAVIERA**
Professor of Asian Studies, University of the Philippines Diliman

1600-1620 **Discussant: Dr. NGEOW Chow Bing**
Deputy Director, Institute of China Studies, University of Malaya

1620-1720 **Discussion**

1800 Depart for dinner place

1900 Dinner

30 April 2017, Sunday

0900-1000 **SESSION IV: “The (Self-)Restrained Embracers”?**

Moderator: Prof. Dr. K.S. Nathan
*Distinguished Fellow, Malaysian Institute of Defence and
Security (MiDAS) & Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign
Relations (IDFR)*

Brunei: **Ms. Ithrana LAWRENCE**
Associate Fellow, EAIR Caucus, National University of Malaysia

Indonesia: **Mr. Yeremia LALISANG**
Lecturer, Department of International Relations, University of Indonesia

Myanmar: **Dr. Khin Ma Ma MYO**
Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Yangon

Thailand: **Ms. Pongkwan SAWASDIPAKDI**
Lecturer, Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University

1000-1020	Discussant: Dr. CHONG Ja Ian <i>Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, National University of Singapore</i>
1020-1120	Discussion
1120-1140	Coffee Break
1140-1245	SESSION V: Wrap-up Discussion & Planning for Next Workshop
1245-1400	Lunch & networking

EAIR | EAST ASIAN
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS CAUCUS