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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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<td>09:30 – 10:00</td>
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| 10:00 – 10:15 | OPENING & WELCOME REMARKS                  | Yang Yang | Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore  
Shaun Lin | Department of Geography, National University of Singapore |
| 10:15 – 12:00 | PANEL 1 – RELIGIOUS NETWORKS                | Chairperson: Yang Yang | National University of Singapore |
| 10:15   | The Politics of ‘Fighting Radicalism/ Saving Uighur’: China’s Presence meets Islamic Movements in Indonesia and Malaysia | Hew Wai Weng | Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia |
| 10:35   | Bringing Chinese Christianity to Southeast Asia: Constructing Transnational Chinese Evangelicism across China and Southeast Asia, 1930s to 1960s | Joshua Dao Wei Sim | National University of Singapore |
| 10:55   | The Contesting Perceptions towards China among Indonesian Muslim: Debates on the Uyghur Case | Wahyudi Akmaliah | Indonesian Institute of Sciences (PMB-LIPI)  
Ibnu Nadzir | Indonesian Institute of Sciences (PMB-LIPI) |
| 11:15 | DISCUSSANT’S COMMENTS | TBD |
| 11:35 | QUESTIONS & ANSWERS | TBD |
| 12:00 – 13:00 | LUNCH                                     |                                                                            |
| 13:00 – 14:45 | PANEL 2 – ETHNIC MINORITIES AND MARGINALIZED GROUPS | Chairperson: TBD |
| 13:00 | Social Construction of Backwardness and the Othering of Cham Muslim in Cambodia under China’s Dominance | Steve K.L. Chan | Keimyung University, South Korea  
Kevin S.Y. Tan | Independent Researcher, Singapore |
<p>| 13:20 | Negotiating Indigenous Engagements of China’s Belt and Road Initiative in Malaysia | Yunci Cai | University of Leicester, UK |
| 13:40 | Sino-Vietnamese Families: Impact of Mother’s Ambiguous Position on the Children’s Lives | Gabriella Angelini | Chinese University of Hong Kong |
| 14:00 | DISCUSSANT’S COMMENTS | TBD |
| 14:20 | QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS | TBD |
| 14:45 – 15:15 | TEA BREAK                                |                                                                            |</p>
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<td>15:15</td>
<td>PANEL 3 – ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND CROSS-BORDER TRADE</td>
<td>Shaun Lin</td>
<td>National University of Singapore</td>
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<td>15:15</td>
<td>China-Laos Connectivity: More than Meets the BRI</td>
<td>Kearrin Sims</td>
<td>James Cook University, Australia</td>
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<td>15:35</td>
<td>Urban Utopia or Pipe Dreams? Examining Chinese-invested Smart City Development in Southeast Asia</td>
<td>Yujia He</td>
<td>University of Kentucky, USA</td>
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<td>Angela Tritto</td>
<td>Hong Kong University of Science and Technology</td>
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<td>15:55</td>
<td>How the ‘New’ Chinese Presence in Cambodia Affects the Ethnic Positioning of the ‘Old’ Chinese</td>
<td>Michiel Verver</td>
<td>University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands</td>
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<td>16:15</td>
<td>DISCUSSANT’S COMMENTS</td>
<td>Simon Rowedder</td>
<td>National University of Singapore</td>
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<td>16:35</td>
<td>QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS</td>
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<td>18:00</td>
<td>CONFERENCE DINNER (For Speakers, Chairpersons &amp; Invited Guests)</td>
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# 14 August 2020 (Friday)

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<td>10:15 – 10:30</td>
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<td>10:30 – 12:15</td>
<td>Panel 4 – Transnational Cultural Interactions</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>Yi’En Cheng</td>
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<td>Sin Yee Koh</td>
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<td>10:30</td>
<td>The Soft Infrastructure of Belt and Road: Imaginaries, Affinities, and Subjectivities in Chinese Transnational Education</td>
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<td>10:50</td>
<td>Re-encountering the Familiar Other: Contesting “Re-Sinicization” in Thailand via ZOOM</td>
<td>Enze Han</td>
<td>The University of Hong Kong</td>
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<td>11:10</td>
<td>Chinese Music across the Seas: Singapore Chinese Orchestra and the Making of Nanyang-Styled Compositions</td>
<td>Ming-yen Lee</td>
<td>Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, Singapore</td>
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<td>Discussant’s Comments</td>
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<td>Questions &amp; Answers</td>
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<td>12:15 – 13:15</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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<td>13:15 – 15:00</td>
<td>Panel 5 – Chinese Foreign Policies and Diplomacy Engagement in SEA</td>
<td>Simon Rowedder</td>
<td>National University of Singapore</td>
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<td>13:15</td>
<td>The Tail Wagging the Body and Head: Mainland Southeast Asia’s Concerns of China’s Lancang Mekong Cooperation (LMC)</td>
<td>Carl Grundy-Warr</td>
<td>National University of Singapore</td>
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<td>Shaun Lin</td>
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<td>13:35</td>
<td>510 Not Found: Indonesian Communist Exiles in China from Revolution to Reform</td>
<td>Taomo Zhou</td>
<td>Nanyang Technological University, Singapore</td>
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<td>14:15</td>
<td>Affect and Memory in Philippines-China Relations: Perspectives from Oral Histories of Philippine Experts</td>
<td>Tina S. Clemente</td>
<td>University of the Philippines-Diliman</td>
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<td>14:35</td>
<td>Discussant’s Comments</td>
<td>Gong Xue</td>
<td>Nanyang Technological University, Singapore</td>
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<tr>
<td>14:55</td>
<td>Questions &amp; Answers</td>
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<td>15:15 – 15:45</td>
<td>Tea Break</td>
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<td>15:45 – 16:15</td>
<td>Closing Remarks</td>
<td>Yang Yang</td>
<td>National University of Singapore</td>
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<td>Shaun Lin</td>
<td>National University of Singapore</td>
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<td>16:15</td>
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The Politics of ‘Fighting Radicalism/ Saving Uighur’: China’s Presence meets Islamic Movements in Indonesia and Malaysia

Hew Wai Weng
Institute of Malaysian and International Studies, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
hewwaiweng@ukm.edu.my

The allegedly China’s prosecution of Muslim Uighur minority in the province of Xinjiang have gained attentions among Muslims in Malaysia and Indonesia. The plight of Uighurs has been increasingly channelled through ‘Islamic’ lense, as ‘Muslim solidarity’ is a way for Uighurs to gain international support, especially among Muslim-majority countries. While the Chinese government justifies the establishment of Uighur camps in the name of ‘fighting radicalism/separatism’, many Muslims in Malaysia and Indonesia see it as a form of discrimination against the Muslim minority and some of them run campaigns to ‘save Uighur’. This paper aims to examine 1) how the Chinese government interacts with Indonesian and Malaysian Muslims over Uighur issue; 2) how Indonesian and Malaysian Muslims organizations/ leaders response over Uighur issue; 3) how perception on increasingly China’s presence in the region is shaping as well as being shaped by ethnic politics and Islamic movements in both countries. Together with the perceived increase of China’s presence and the perceived growing political power of ethnic Chinese, Uighur issue has also turned into a domestic issue. The Islamic oppositions in Malaysia and Indonesia have been very vocal in supporting Uighurs. They accuse the ruling government and affiliated Muslim organizations for being ‘pro-China’ and for their inability in ‘defending Muslim’.

Hew Wai Weng is fellow at the Institute of Malaysian and International Studies, the National University of Malaysia (IKMAS, UKM). He has published on Chinese Muslim identities, Hui migration, and urban middle-class Muslim aspirations in Malaysia and Indonesia. He is the author of Chinese Ways of Being Muslim: Negotiating Ethnicity and Religiosity in Indonesia (NIAS Press, 2018).
Bringing Chinese Christianity to Southeast Asia: Constructing Transnational Chinese Evangelicalism across China and Southeast Asia, 1930s to 1960s

Joshua Dao Wei Sim
Department of History, National University of Singapore
sim.joshua@u.nus.edu

Scholars have made commendable advances in analysing the agency of Chinese Christians in translating and producing local versions of their faith in China. Yet, little work has been done on examining them as transnational agents of Christianity. Through the use of previously-neglected primary sources, this paper offers an interpretation of how a group of Chinese evangelical leaders initiated and constructed their visions and versions of transnational Christianity across China and Southeast Asia in the 1930s to 1960s. Two representative organisations are examined. The first concerns the transnational network of Chinese evangelistic bands that the prominent revivalist-evangelist John Sung established across China and Southeast Asia in the 1930s and 1940s. The bands’ sources reveal how they played a key role in imbuing a transnational landscape and common-sense of spiritual revival into the imaginations of the Chinese churches, making them consumers and producers of revival. The second case evaluates the cross-border institutional-building work of the Evangelize China Fellowship, a major transnational Chinese evangelical denomination founded by Sung’s colleague Andrew Gih after World War II. The analysis reveals how the Fellowship utilised a faith-based developmental agenda to promote Christianity among the overseas Chinese communities across Southeast Asia, Taiwan and Hong Kong in the 1950s to 1960s. This agenda emphasised the building of an array of institutions that groomed Chinese Christians to serve their respective host countries. In all, paying attention to Chinese Christian imaginaries of Southeast Asia enables us to understand how they connected faith adherents living across Asia into transnational ethno-religious communities.

Joshua Dao Wei Sim is a historian of Christianity and Modern China. He is interested in questions pertaining to evangelicalism and fundamentalism, the relationship between Chinese and Christian intellectual history, Chinese religions, and transnational history. Currently, Joshua is a PhD Candidate from the Department of History in the National University of Singapore. His doctoral dissertation is on the transnational organisational and intellectual history of Chinese evangelicalism in the twentieth century, with a specific focus on the transnational careers of a number of prominent Chinese evangelicals from the 1920s to 1960s. He has published articles and book reviews in *Fides et Historia*, *Reading Religion* and the *Research Center for Chinese Christianity*. 
The Contesting Perceptions towards China among Indonesian Muslims: 
Debates on the Uyghur Case

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The Islamic community in Indonesia has always been connected to international issues. A social or political event that is perceived to have a significant impact on the global Islamic community would draw much attention in Indonesian news outlets. Moreover, many Islamic organizations are also familiar with developing formal or informal ties to international Islamic institutions to create the program of local da’wa. Within this backdrop, it is no wonder when China’s government is rumored to discriminate Uyghur minority groups, which mainly identified as Muslim; the news is reacted strongly by many Islamic organizations. Despite the lack of knowledge and nuances about the situation in China, many Islamic organizations projected strong positions regarding the issues. Islamic Conservative groups publicly stated that the Indonesian government should condemn China for its atrocities conducted toward the Uyghur community. On the other hand, NU and Muhammadiyah, two of the most established Islamic organizations in Indonesia, held the position that there is no human rights violation in China. A position that drew much criticism from the conservative groups, mainly because both NU and Muhammadiyah are accused of receiving many privileges from China government. In this regard, the paper will explore the dynamics of the issue in Indonesia based on contestation between Islamic organizations. The article then argues that the perception toward China on Uyghur’s case is less about the actual event, rather more as an implication from the ongoing contestation between Islamic organizations as religious authorities in Indonesia.

Wahyudi Akmaliah is a researcher at the Research Centre of Society and Culture, Indonesian Institute of Sciences (PMB-LIPI). He received his bachelor degree in Islamic Education from Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University (2003), master degree in Cultural Studies, Sanata Dharma University (2008) and master degree in International Peace Studies, the University for Peace, Costa Rica (2010). His research interests focus on Islam, identity, and popular culture. Some of his works are published in Journal of Indonesian Social Sciences and Humanities, Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies, Al-Jāmi’ah: Journal of Islamic Studies, and Studia Islamika.

Ibnu Nadzir is a researcher of cultural and social anthropology at Research Center for Society and Culture, Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) since 2011. He received his master degree from Anthropology department at University of Amsterdam with thesis about the use of Internet among Indonesian exiles in the Netherland. In the past few years, his research focuses on Internet mediation and Islamic social movements.
Social Construction of Backwardness and the Othering of Cham Muslim in Cambodia under China’s Dominance

Steve K.L. Chan  
Keimyung University, South Korea  
stevec@kmu.ac.kr

Kevin S.Y. Tan  
Independent Researcher, Singapore

The Mekong is one of the longest transboundary river running along the mainland of Southeast Asia. The headwater of Mekong River originates in Tibetan Plateau of China, making it the dominant upstream nation. The cascades of dams have been erected on the upstream in China. Some more are planned in the mid-reach of Mekong. These dams block rivers and redirect the water flow into reservoirs, storing up potential energy for hydroelectric power generation. Existing watershed communities, irrigation and fishery are usually sacrificed for this sort of unsustainable development. In Cambodia, many communities have resided near the major rivers. These people rely on the river for their subsistence of production. In the past two decades, China has been heavily investing in and industrialised Cambodia which determines the country’s development. This empirical research is a study of a Muslim Cham riverside community in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. They are ethnic minorities living on fishing for generations along Tonlé Sap River. Their original settlement was resumed for urban development. These vulnerable people were relocated to the Mekong riverside which has less fishing yield after the river has been dammed. This paper argues that water hegemony, economic dependence and political patronage determined the development path of Cambodia. The ethnic Cham’s riverside community at Phnom Penh and their subsistence way of production are socially constructed as backwardness as to pave the way for the economic benefit of China.

Steve K.L. Chan is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Keimyung University, South Korea. Prior to this teaching position, he taught in the Singapore Institute of Management University and Lingnan University, Hong Kong. His research interests include economic sociology, political sociology, environmental politics, ethnicity and migration. He has been a visiting fellow of Chulalongkorn University and the Chiangmai University of Thailand. His recent publications are found in Cosmopolitan Civil Societies, International Journal of Development Issues, Environment and Urbanization ASIA, and the like. He received his PhD from the School of Social and Political Science, University of Melbourne.

Kevin S.Y. Tan is a sociologist and cultural anthropologist. He obtained his doctorate from the University of Alberta in Canada. His research interests include urban anthropology, migration, transnationalism and borderlands studies. He was formerly the Head of Programme of graduate programmes in social development and non-profit management at the Singapore University of Social Sciences.
Negotiating Indigenous Engagements of China’s Belt and Road Initiative in Malaysia

Yunci Cai
School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, UK
yc277@leicester.ac.uk

Based on long-term ethnographic study of the indigenous Mah Meri communities at Pulau Carey and Orang Seletar communities at Danga Bay, both in Peninsular Malaysia, I examine the changing relationship between the Indigenous peoples and the Chinese communities over time. I examine how the Indigenous communities’ engagements with the Chinese communities have changed in the last decade with the emergence of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Once perceived as natural allies by the coastal Orang Seletar and Mah Meri communities to resist and contest the hegemonic Malay-Muslim dominance in Malaysia, the Chinese communities have come under scrutiny as mainland Chinese investments under the BRI at Danga Bay and Palau Carey have encroached on their native customary territories, and destroyed the natural environments which the Indigenous communities depend on for their livelihoods. Drawing on their oral histories, languages and other cultural practices which feature their ancestors’ friendly engagements and instances of inter-marriages and cultural assimilation with the Chinese communities over centuries, I show how largely positive engagements of the Indigenous communities with the Chinese communities have been complicated by the recent encroachment of their native customary territories by Chinese investments promoted under the BRI. I demonstrate how the concept of ‘Chinese-ness’ is a social construct intersected by nationality, history, wealth and social class. In negotiating these complexities, the Indigenous communities seem to orient their grievances over the encroachment of their native customary territories towards the Malay-Muslim government in Malaysia, rather than the Chinese investors that give rise to these encroachments.

Yunci Cai is Lecturer in Museum Studies. She is co-director of the MA/MSc/PG Diploma in Heritage and Interpretation (distance learning) programme and co-leader to develop a new MA in Heritage Studies (campus-based) programme at the School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester. Yunci holds a PhD in Museum and Heritage Studies and a Master of Arts with Distinction in Museum Studies, both from the Institute of Archaeology, University College London and a First-Class Honours in Geography from the National University of Singapore. She has interests about the cultural politics and museologies in and of Asia. Her forthcoming sole-authored monograph Staging Indigenous Heritage explores the politics of heritage-making at four indigenous cultural villages in Malaysia. She has been conducting research with the indigenous Mah Meri communities at Pulau Carey and Orang Seletar communities at Danga Bay, both in Peninsular Malaysia since 2014.
Sino-Vietnamese Families: Impact of Mother’s Ambiguous Position on the Children’s Lives

Gabriella Angelini
Chinese University of Hong Kong
g.angelini793@hotmail.com

Sino-Vietnamese cross-border marriages have attracted increasing attention in recent times due to concerns about trafficking and to the increase in marriage migration since the mid-twentieth century. The importance of studying this phenomenon is evident in the fact that it interrelates with some of the most relevant problems of today’s Chinese society: gender imbalance, internal migration, lowering birth rate, etc.

Nevertheless, so far the academic research has focused almost exclusively on the problems of Vietnamese marriage migrants (such as trafficking vs. free will, difficulties in immigration and marriage registration, conflict with husband or his relatives, social stigma), with their children as occasional side appearances. Certainly, from a legal standpoint, while Sino-Vietnamese children can also encounter registration problems (with the birth control policy in the past, and sometimes when the father has already another family), they are generally able to obtain the Chinese citizenship with relative easiness. However, it is important to ask: how are the children’s lives impacted by these women’s precarious status?

This paper aims to investigate the influence and repercussions of Vietnamese women’s difficult position within the Chinese society on their children’s day-to-day reality, and perception of themselves, looking in particular at some real life cases and testimonies.

Gabriella Angelini is a waiting-to-be PhD student in Anthropology. She obtained her MA in International Relations of Asia and Africa at the University of Naples L’Orientale in 2017, after spending time in China and Vietnam to study the local language and culture. In 2016, Ms Angelini has presented the preliminary results of her research project on the impact of the Trans-Pacific Partnership on the economy of Vietnam at the 3rd ItaSEAS (Italian Association of Southeast Asian Studies) Conference. And she has collaborated with the Italian online magazine Il Caffè Geopolitico analyzing Vietnamese foreign policy and following the 2016 elections. Currently her work interests have shifted onto questions of gender, family, and identity, with a special focus on Sino-Vietnamese cross-border families, but she keeps a more holistic interdisciplinary perspective derived from her previous studies.
China-Laos Connectivity: More than Meets the BRI

Kearrin Sims
Development Studies, James Cook University, Australia
Kearrin.sims@jcu.edu.au

Traversing more than 130 countries and multiple economic sectors, the BRI is a world-transforming connectivity agenda that places China at the centre of new global political, economic and cultural geographies. In Laos, BRI is advanced foremost through the US$7 billion Pan-Asia railway, which extends 414km from the China-Lao border in Luang Namtha province to the Thai-Lao border in Vientiane province. The largest and most expensive megaproject ever built in Laos, the railway will have profound social, economic and environmental effects. Once completed, it will connect Laos to a transnational network of planned railways linking China, Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore and Vietnam. Through the railway, the BRI will almost certainly become one of the most influential forces shaping geographies of connectivity and development in Laos. Yet, while BRI’s significance is difficult to overstate, this paper argues that analyses of China and Laos’ shared development futures must look both through and beyond a BRI-centric lens. By drawing attention to some of the manifold entanglements between China and Laos that both precede and exceed BRI’s effects, it argues that the reductivism of complex histories and futures into BRI narratives problematically advances Beijing’s geopolitical ambitions while simultaneously erasing the diverse materialities and subjectivities of China-Lao connectivities. In making this argument, the paper uses Laos as a case study to demonstrate the need for broader nuance within academia regarding the normative adoption of BRI discourses as a new, encompassing, ‘sense-making’ tool for explaining China’s ‘presence’ within BRI-partner countries. The analysis presented here draws on approximately 14 months fieldwork examining China-Lao development cooperation in Laos, undertaken between 2011 and 2018.

Kearrin Sims is a lecturer of Development Studies at James Cook University (JCU). He is the program convenor of JCU’s Master of Global Development, a Research Fellow at JCU’s Cairns Institute, and Chair of the University’s Sustainable Development Working Group. Prior to coming to JCU, Kearrin lectured at the University of Newcastle and Western Sydney University. Kearrin is the author of scholarly and mainstream publication outputs on a wide range of development topics, including: “Teaching Development Studies in Times of Change”, Asia Pacific Viewpoint (2018); “Casino Enclaves, Development and Poverty Alleviation in Laos”, Pacific Affairs (2017), and; “Culture, community-oriented learning and the post-2015 development agenda: a view from Laos”, Third World Quarterly (2015). He was a founding member of the Association of Mainland Southeast Asian Scholars (AMSEAS) and the Development Studies Association of Australia (DSAA). Kearrin is a critical development scholar with research training in Sociology and International Relations. He has a particular interest in China’s contribution to development transformations within Mainland Southeast Asia.
Urban Utopia or Pipe Dreams? 
Examining Chinese-invested Smart City Development in Southeast Asia

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Angela Tritto
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Smart cities, widely touted as solutions to the challenges of urbanization and sustainable development, are gaining traction in Southeast Asia, a fast-growing region with an expected increase of 100 million urban residents in 2017-2030. With experience in smart city development at home, and the call for smart city cooperation under China’s Belt and Road Initiative, Chinese firms are poised to take advantage of the region’s new market opportunities. However, few existing studies examine their roles. This paper fills the gap through an empirical case study of the role of Chinese investment in smart city development in Iskandar Malaysia, the southern development corridor in Johor, Malaysia. It builds on the literature framing smart cities not as technical solutions, but urban megaprojects whose development process involves social and political contestations as well as impacts (Bunnell, 2002; Hollands, 2015; Oakes, 2019). We find that Chinese-invested megaprojects are often the result of economic interest of both investors and local authorities. However, their visibility and considerable impacts could lead to opposition from local affected stakeholders, which in turn can expose them to targeting by political leaders. This process eventually prompts Chinese firms to enhance local engagement. We employ both primary data gathered from interviews with government officials, developers, business leaders, tech entrepreneurs, researchers and NGOs, and secondary data from news articles and industry publications. The paper is strongly relevant to the workshop’s focus converging bottom-up local perspective and top-down process of Southeast Asia-China connections. It fits the second topic “real estate development and infrastructural mega-projects”.

Yujia He is Assistant Professor at the Patterson School of Diplomacy and International Commerce, University of Kentucky. Her areas of expertise are international political economy and science and technology policy. Previously she was a Postdoctoral Fellow at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology’s Institute for Emerging Market Studies (IEMS). She also worked in Washington DC as a visiting fellow for the Atlantic Council and as a researcher for the Wilson Center. Her research has appeared in International Journal of Emerging Markets, Resources Policy, and several think tank reports. She obtained her PhD in International Affairs, Science and Technology (IAST) and MS in International Affairs from Georgia Tech, BS in Chemistry from Peking University and Stanford China Program certificate. She is a co-investigator of an IEMS-funded project “Green and Smart or Black and Clumsy? Examining the role of Chinese investors in ASEAN's sustainable development”.

Angela Tritto (PhD, City University of Hong Kong) is a Postdoctoral Fellow at Institute for Emerging Market Studies, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, and a research affiliate at the Southeast Asia Research Centre at City University of Hong Kong. Currently, she is working on three interrelated research projects on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Southeast Asia. She has completed a case study on the BRI in Indonesia and is conducting further research on Malaysia and Myanmar. Her areas of research interests include China and Southeast Asia, the BRI, environmental policies and technologies, sustainable development, and heritage management. She is currently leading a research project titled “Green and Smart or Black and Clumsy? Examining the Role of Chinese Investors in ASEAN's Sustainable Development,” where she analyzes patterns of Chinese investments in Southeast Asia. Her past and upcoming publications include research articles on eco-innovations in heritage management, fintech, smart cities, and a series of case studies and articles on the Belt and Road Initiative.
How the ‘New’ Chinese Presence in Cambodia Affects the Ethnic Positioning of the ‘Old’ Chinese

Michiel Verver
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Netherlands
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The recent inflow of Chinese tourists, investors, entrepreneurs and skilled labourers has spurred diverse reactions among established Chinese minorities in Southeast Asia. Some perceive new opportunities to act as brokers between Chinese capital and local political and economic interests. Others instead fear that the increased salience of Chinese culture, capital and identity may re-ignite the anti-Chinese sentiments that swept across the region in the late twentieth century. Either way, the influx of new Chinese is changing the meaning of Chinese ethnicity in Southeast Asia. The aim of this paper is to trace those changes in the context of Cambodia, in particular from the perspective of the local ethnic Chinese business community, drawing on fieldwork conducted in Phnom Penh in 2010-11 and to be conducted in 2020. The dominant picture that emerged from fieldwork in 2010-11 is one of blurred boundaries between Khmer and Chinese identities, and a highly situational but largely unproblematic positioning in between these identities. A lot has changed, however, in ten years’ time. Investment, economic migration and tourism from China have mushroomed. Meanwhile, there is growing discontent among Cambodians about competition from Chinese entrepreneurs, the limited trickle-down effect of Chinese investment, perceived loss of sovereignty, and land evictions and natural resources depletion associated with Chinese real-estate projects. Anecdotal evidence suggests that anti-Chinese sentiments are on the rise. Overlaying ethnic discourses in 2010-11 and 2020, the central questions in this paper is whether and how these changes have affected the positioning of Cambodia’s local ethnic Chinese business community.

Michiel Verver is Assistant Professor at the Department of Organization Sciences, Vrije Universiteit (VU) Amsterdam, the Netherlands. His research interests include Cambodia’s private sector dynamics and ethnic Chinese minority in the context of the country’s political economy. On a more conceptual level, his academic expertise lies in the anthropology of entrepreneurship, including immigrant and ethnic minority entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial family businesses, elite entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship. Michiel has conducted extensive qualitative field research in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and Bangkok, Thailand. His papers are published in journals in the fields of Asian studies and entrepreneurship studies, including the Journal of Contemporary Asia, Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, and Entrepreneurship and Regional Development. At the VU Amsterdam, he teaches courses on globalization and qualitative methodology, and supervises students in Culture, Organization & Management.
The Soft Infrastructure of Belt and Road: Imaginaries, Affinities, and Subjectivities in Chinese Transnational Education

Yi’En Cheng
Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore
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Sin Yee Koh
Monash University Malaysia
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Drawing upon ongoing research using qualitative and ethnographic methods conducted at Xiamen University and its overseas campus, Xiamen University Malaysia (XMUM), this paper provides a critical reading of transnational education as a component of the soft infrastructure of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). We interrogate XMUM as an instance of broader Chinese efforts to internationalise higher education, to entrench Chinese transnational education as a form of soft infrastructure within wider geopolitical and cultural diplomacy in Asia, and as a transnational site in and through which new regional imaginaries, affinities and subjectivities are produced and contested.

We begin by discussing how XMUM is borne out of a particular co-construction of historical and cultural affinity centered around the revered figure of Tan Kah Kee between Chinese and Malaysia elites, and the ways in which this narrative is being disrupted and omitted by Chinese, international, and local students. We demonstrate the limited extent to which Chinese international students perform their role as cultural ambassadors in the host institution and city. We then show how students chart their imaginative geographies that center China in the new world economy and simultaneously decenter its place in their individual post-study aspirations and mobility desires.

In concluding, we argue that the imaginaries, affinities, and subjectivities that the BRI vision seeks to produce is unstable and provisional as they travel from state-led visions on paper to students’ actually-existing realities. However, the students’ grounded narratives and practices are not straightforward alternatives but rather they are also capable of reinforcing dominant Chinese scripts.

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China has now become the largest source of outbound tourism in the world, and Thailand is one of the most popular destinations. Currently numbered around 10 million per annum and constituting almost a quarter of the total tourists visiting Thailand, Chinese tourists have started making a strong imprint on Thailand’s tourist landscape. The influx of the Chinese tourists has created new challenges for the local Thai tourism industry as they bring with them distinct Chinese business practices and culturally specific consumption demands. Sophisticated Chinese online tourism platforms and their local networks have created this service chain in Thailand whereby they set up shops, hotels, restaurants, car-hires, and package tours to serve the Chinese tourists. At the same time, there has been a new wave of Chinese migration to Thailand to look for business and working opportunities to service this large number of tourists. As a result, there are prevalent mainland Chinese language and cultural symbols in Thailand, but also there are increasing frictions between them and the local Thai businesses and community at large. This paper focuses on these new encounters between local Thais and the incoming mainland Chinese in terms of how cultural boundaries are created, contested and renegotiated, specifically within the context of Thailand’s long history of Chinese migration a couple of generations prior. Using interviews and field observations, the paper investigates the phenomenon of “re-sinicization” in Thailand, and its contested nature within the broad Thai political and cultural milieu.

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Chinese Music across the Seas: Singapore Chinese Orchestra and the Making of Nanyang-Styled Compositions

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Founded in 1997, the Singapore Chinese Orchestra (Xinjiapo huayue tuan 新加坡華樂團) is the first and only professional modern Chinese orchestra in Southeast Asia. Unlike the modern Chinese Orchestras of mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan that seek to celebrate “Chineseness” and collaborate with one another across the straits, the Singapore Chinese Orchestra attempts to highlight the “Southeast Asianness” of the Chinese diaspora in their musical performances. This paper examines the Nanyang-Styled (Nanyang feng 南洋風) compositions of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra, focusing on their commissioned compositions as well as music pieces composed for composition competitions. Drawing Tu Wei-Ming’s (1991) concept of “Cultural China,” which he argues that the “periphery” displaced China as the cultural center for the articulation of “Chineseness,” this study demonstrates how Chinese musicians in the Southeast Asian “periphery” emerged as musicians of a “Cultural China.” It argues that the Singapore Chinese Orchestra produces the Nanyang-Styled compositions to engage with China on the one hand, and presents the hybridized identity of the Chinese communities in Southeast Asia on the other. By mixing elements of modern Chinese orchestra with Southeast Asian musical styles, the Singapore Chinese Orchestra produces a uniquely Singaporean Chinese music—modern Chinese orchestra music with Southeast Asian characteristics.

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The Tail Wagging the Body and Head: Mainland Southeast Asia’s Concerns of China’s Lancang Mekong Cooperation (LMC)

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Sub-regional developments in mainland Southeast Asia arising from China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) are potentially destabilising existing trans-border institutions, such as the Mekong River Commission (MRC), whilst fostering new ones, with China very much at the helm, namely the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC). Such BRI political economic connections matter for each of the mainland Southeast Asian countries, however, the transboundary LMC could arguably push mainland Southeast Asia collectively in uncertain and new geopolitical directions, and the LMC has already realigned geo-power in favour the upstream “tail” of the Lancang Jiang (in China) over the rest of the Mekong Basin. Until recently, the MRC has been the key transboundary inter-state mechanism, established by the post-Cold War 1995 Mekong Agreement that is supposed to promote sustainable development of the Lower Mekong waterways and Basin. Crucially, the most populous, biodiverse, and ecologically connected parts of the Basin are the “body and head”, namely the Lower Mekong Basin and Delta region, where millions of people still rely largely on the pulsing flood pulse ecosystem and freshwater fisheries of the Mekong. The creation of the recent mechanism, the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) framework, which has a China Secretariat, already partially acts as an alternative to the MRC and to some extent, rival the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) for broader development in mainland Southeast Asia. Our paper critically examines the political economic, biophysical and geopolitical implications of the “tail wagging the body and head”, and consider how China’s bilateral and new regional riparian relations are transforming the geographies of the Mekong.

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510 Not Found:
Indonesian Communist Exiles in China from Revolution to Reform

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This paper tells the story of a group of “intimate strangers” whose lives were tied together by a little-known “510 Office of the International Liaison Department of the Chinese Communist Party.” Located in the suburban of Nanchang, the provincial capital of the landlocked Jiangxi in southeast China, 510 was a closed compound built in 1976 by the Chinese Government to shelter more than 300 Southeast Asian communist exiles, the majority of whom from Indonesia. Most of the Indonesians arrived in China in the early and mid-1960s and became accidental exiles as the political turmoil in the archipelago in 1965-1966 made it impossible for them to return home. Through the 1960s and early 1970s, they lived a comfortable material life and were exempt from the economic hardship and excruciating political campaigns that overshadowed the everyday lives of ordinary Chinese during the tempestuous Cultural Revolution. Yet this secluded community were also under constant surveillance and close control by their Chinese host.

With the 1972 Sino-US rapprochement and rural agricultural de-collectivization starting in the late 1970s, China embarked on a redirection of foreign policies, domestic politics and nation economy. As China sought normalization of diplomatic relations with the anti-communist Suharto government in Indonesia, the exiles’ very existence became an embarrassment to Beijing. Meanwhile, the Chinese staff of 510—whose entire careers were built on taking care of the honorable “foreign guests”, but few spoke their languages—suffered a significant pay cut as financial support to international communist movement no longer enjoyed priority in the state’s fiscal plans. How did the Indonesian and Chinese members of the 510-community adapt to the Reform and Opening? Based on fieldwork conducted in Jiangxi in 2013 and 2019, as well as written and oral history sources from the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, this paper shows that the 510-community responded in varied and creative ways. While the mass majority of the exiles left for Europe, those who stayed became neutralized Chinese citizens and some even transformed themselves into devoted advocates of “socialism of Chinese characteristic,” as epitomized in Deng Xiaoping’s developmentalism. Some of their Chinese caretakers, on the other hand, were exceptionally entrepreneurial as they found business opportunities by utilizing the infrastructure of 510 in the early years of reform. Overall, this paper hopes to reveal how the reorientation of Chinese policy toward Southeast Asia, particularly its renouncement of revolutionary diplomacy, manifested in the day-to-day economic lives of people caught up in the changing dynamics of geopolitics.

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In 2020, Myanmar and China plan to conduct a third joint inspection of their 2,227-km-long border. According to recent reports, officials from the two countries will conduct aerial photographic surveys, erect new boundary pillars, repair and reconstruct damaged and missing pillars, and draw new maps. The two countries reached a boundary agreement already in 1961 and as part of it committed to conducting joint inspections every five years. Such inspections, however, occurred only twice: in 1984-1986 and in 1992-1995. To be sure, the China-Myanmar border has been riddled with territorial disputes both before and after the 1961 agreement, and the two countries’ promises of frequent joint inspections seem to hint to its not-so-stable nature. From the perspective of border studies, this example echoes recent scholarship positing that borders are not fixed lines imposed upon a passive terrain, but should rather be addressed and understood through the social practices of demarcating, managing, crossing and policing them. Accordingly, borders are always a site of encounter as much as one of containment. What I ask in this paper is how this relation, between encounter and containment, takes concrete shape, and how it is contingent to particular economic, political, cultural and environmental entanglements. In particular, I employ a long-durée perspective on the China-Burma border, to show how the logics of encounter and containment have transformed throughout the last 150 years. I do so by engaging the three inter-connected tropes of terrain, technology, and trade. The paper is based on an original combination of archival research, interviews with former members of the Communist Party of Burma who were active along this border in the 1970s and 1980s, and an ethnography of contemporary cross-border practices.

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I attempt to bring to light the ideas and perspectives of senior China/Chinese specialists in the Philippines through an analysis of oral histories. The research employs an anthropology of knowledge approach and considers both the individual’s knowledge on China/Chinese—as shaped by experiences, choices, personal histories—and the larger habitus of ideas. In particular, the study takes careful stock of the evolution of experts’ perspectives of China over many years in conjunction with the contexts of history and attendant events of social, political, and economic issues.

The significance of interrogating oral histories and the evolution of China specialists’ perspectives is in how they shed nuanced light on Philippines-China relations that begin in the intellectual and affective level of the thinker. The work contributes in a contextual or grounded perspective on Philippines-China connections, which shape discourses on foreign relations and people-to-people relations.

A key insight of the paper is the unique context of intellectual linkages of China experts in the Philippines and how such connections shaped their China watching. Furthermore, the study finds that flexible epistemological approaches such as comparative studies on oral histories can enrich the study of Southeast Asia-China connections and encourage collaboration across thinkers and research interests in the region.

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