

Research Student Seminar Series 4



Speaker: Mr CHOI Chi Yat Charlton
PhD Program
Department of Applied Social Sciences
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Date: 7 February 2022 (Monday)

Time: 11:00 am - 12:30 pm (via Zoom)

Join Zoom Meeting

Meeting URL: <https://polyu.zoom.us/j/95150469524>

Meeting ID: 951 5046 9524

Passcode: 462862

Topic: Small States and Environmental Politics in Southeast Asia: The Case of Mekong Dam Controversies

Abstract:

Recent findings suggest that Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar (CLM states) are not powerless in the environmental politics of the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS). In the case of Xayaburi dam construction, Laos explicitly bypassed opposition from Vietnam, whereas Myanmar unilaterally suspended China's proposal of the Myitsone dam. While conventional wisdom highlights the potential role of transnational actors in the empowerment of CLM states, I focus on state-to-state interactions in the GMS dam controversies. With a sociological re-reading of the English School of International Relations (ES), I conjecture that the inherent ambiguities, and competing interpretations, of the norms i.e., sovereignty, development, and environment offer CLM states manoeuvrable space for creative agency. In this endeavour, I raise the central research question, *how far can CLM states navigate normative contradictions between sovereignty, development, and environment in regional politics dominated by the US and China, and (de)legitimise certain practices and norms advanced by their stronger regional counterparts whose interests are deemed at odds with their own?* My project makes three contributions to the hitherto scholarship of International Relations. First, I study the agency of smaller states in GMS environmental politics from a normative perspective. Second, I highlight a societal aspect of global governance; multilateral institutions are not only systems of law and regulations but also inter-subjective understandings of appropriate international conduct. Third, I situate dam controversies into a wider global/regional normative development which adds nuances to current ES scholarship of environmental stewardship.

Speaker's brief biography:

Charlton Choi is undertaking the research attachment scheme of APSS under the supervision of Dr Karita Kan. He is also a PhD student at the University of Bristol, School of Sociology, Politics, and International Studies. He is currently under the supervision of Professor Yongjin Zhang (Chief supervisor) and Dr Robert Yates (co-supervisor). His research interests are on English School of International Relations, agency of small states and environmental governance in Southeast Asia.

ALL ARE WELCOME