The Effects of Chinese Finance in Ecuador’s Model of Development: An Assessment from the Neo-liberal Period to the Post-boom of Commodity Prices
by Ms Gabriela Sofia NUNEZ WONG (Presenter 1, 2:30 - 3:15 pm)
PhD Candidate, Department of Asian International Studies

ABSTRACT: The aim of this research is to shed light on the debate of China as a challenge to the United States’ scope of influence. It does so by examining China’s method to access state assets of countries in South America. China’s diversification of financial assets has turned into an alternative source of finance for several underdeveloped countries allowing them to play off the neo-liberal model that has governed the development strategy since the 1980s, and an alternative development strategy sponsored by Chinese loans. While these developing countries have built new state assets through the access to Chinese finance, they have been experiencing a pendulum that goes back and forth from an alternative model of development to neo-liberalism.

With my recent fieldwork in Ecuador, I seek to assess how Chinese investments have contributed to alter Ecuador’s model of development, and whether it has replaced the United States as a traditional partner and ally. I argue that not only China is not challenging the US influence in the country, but also it has strengthened the latter’s position as its greatest ally.

Empirically, I have chosen to analyze three sectors that were affected by the neo-liberal area since the 1980s: oil, mining, and the construction sector, and that resurged along with greatest control of the state over these sectors with the presence of China. Whereas China’s presence has filled a void of finance and investments left by the United States and other traditional partners for South American countries, and it has increased its influence, a counter-offensive against Chinese companies and their influence starts to become more evident in Ecuador.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER: Gabriela Nunez Wong is a doctoral student in the Department of Asian and International Studies at the City University of Hong Kong. She has worked as a Middle School Lecturer in the First School of Anhui province, and as Corporate Trainer in the Fortune 500 Maersk (马士基) based in Chengdu, China.

Soft Power Battlegrounds: China and Japan’s Competing Strategies of Attraction in Southeast Asia
by Mr Daniele CARMINATI (Presenter 2, 3:15 - 4:00 pm)
PhD Candidate, Department of Asian International Studies

ABSTRACT: Joseph Nye’s concept of soft power is increasingly valued across the globe. Yet it is also often criticized and downplayed due to the difficulties in assessing its ‘fuzzy’ outcomes. These critiques will be addressed by constructing a methodology to operationalize its measurement in East Asia. China and Japan, the two major powers in the region, are openly showing interest in advancing this form of power. For instance, the two are trying to gather resources, such as cultural and economic assets, while implementing targeted strategies in different parts of the world. This study focuses on two case studies: Thailand and the Philippines. The first step is to assess how China and Japan understand soft power and outline their main objectives and strategies. This will be accomplished through an analysis of their official documents and policy. The second step is to investigate how the respective efforts are received by the target audiences in the aforementioned ‘soft power battlegrounds’. Interviews with scholars, experts, politicians, business people, and journalists will be used to measure the impact and influence of these strategies. Surveys in universities will also be performed to reveal the opinion and perception of the locals towards the two countries and their conduct. The final step is to combine the findings to evaluate which actor is proving to be the major influencer in the region and beyond.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER: Daniele Carminati is a PhD candidate in Asian and International Studies at City University of Hong Kong. His interest revolves around globalization dynamics and issues across East and Southeast Asia with a particular focus on sociocultural matters. He has a mixed background in communication studies and international relations from several universities between Europe and Asia. Daniele is also a commissioning editor at E-International Relations.
ABSTRACT: Since 2004, a brutal and ‘silent’ conflict has been waged in southern Thailand by anti-state forces targeting Thai-Buddhist settlers, local Muslim collaborators, members of the security forces, those involved in education and anyone seen as representing the Thai state or Thai identity. The main organisation driving the insurgency is Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN), a secretive and unique organisation whose structure and selection of targets has been shaped by the institutional development of the south as part of Thailand as well as the failure of the Cold-War era insurgency in the south.

A seemingly strict divide between Area studies experts and anthropologists covering the conflict has been identified in the past by Christopher Joll. I aim to bridge this divide and accurately show the relevance of writings from the field of ethnology and anthropology to understanding why southern Thailand’s separatist conflict has not received the level of support that it required and that was often assumed was available to it.

Seen as unprecedented by many veteran analysts, there has been a constant and continual decline in attacks by casualties since 2014. Very little academic literature has been produced concerning the conflict since 2014 and much of the early explanations surrounding southern Thailand’s violence now appear to be under-developed or over-stated. On a personal level, I have lived in southern Thailand for over two years, including nearly a year in Pattani city. My experiences in the south have informed my analysis of southern society and of the sometimes conflicting identities and loyalties of its inhabitants.

Theoretically, I aim to show how BRN’s selection of targets has led to a decline in both tacit and active support for the insurgency. I also intend to provide a detailed background of historical processes related to four key dimensions of the conflict: (i) The ideological and institutional development of Thailand, (ii) the integration and institutional development of (the former) Sultanate of Patani, (iii) the incremental and uneven integration/co-aptation of the Malay-Muslim population, and (iv) the history of patterns of violence in the south and how the nature of violence has changed over time in reaction the Thai state’s increasingly effective and widespread penetration of local institutions. By analysing the changing nature of these four phenomena, supported by the qualitative and participant observation carried out since 2011, and most recently in the summer of 2018, I aim to explain why BRN’s insurgency has been carried out the way is has since 2004, and why ultimately, this insurgency is currently in a process of inevitable decline.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER: Gerard McDermott is a researcher, writer & photographer from the Republic of Ireland. He has previously published with Peace Review, Politico and Peace Research. His research interests include separatism, resource-related conflict, ethnicity, nationalism, imperialism, and state-building.

**Green Techno-Nationalism: Japan’s use of Green Technology as a National Asset**

_Abstract:_ Since the early 1990s, Japan has actively promoted its green technology abroad as part of its diplomatic efforts to present itself as an environmental champion in international affairs. Using its financial and technological assets, Japan is keen to participate in multilateral and bilateral initiatives in order to contribute to solving global environmental issues, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. Japan is one of the top inventors of green technology and the country has economic, political and ethical incentives for promoting the diffusion of Japanese green technology overseas. However, evidence suggests that the country is reluctant to share this technology, preferring to keep tight control over it. This project aims to explain this contradiction by applying the concept of techno-nationalism to examine how the Japanese government is promoting the development and the overseas transfer of green technology. It argues that the Japanese government views green technology as a national asset crucial for the country’s prosperity and security. The corollary is the government promotes the domestic development of complex new green innovations while transferring less recent technologies abroad. In the long term, such a policy is likely to damage the country’s reputation internationally and diminish Japanese diplomacy’s ability to resolve environmental issues, which in turn will threaten the country’s security.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER: Friso G.W. Morand is PhD researcher at the Department of Asian and International Studies, City University of Hong Kong. He completed his BA and MA in Japanese Studies as well as a MA in International Relations at Leiden University in the Netherlands. After working for a few years in a Japanese company, he decided to go back to school and research Japanese environmental diplomacy.

*All are Welcome*