

Summer Semester 2022

SDAC Guest Lecture Series

China-Malaysia Ties and Belt-and-Road Projects: A 'Special Friendship' Going Toxic?

Tomáš Petrů
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18-20:00 c.t.
Via Zoom

Tomáš Petrů (Ph.D.) is Research Fellow at the Oriental Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences and Assistant Professor of Indonesian Studies at Charles University in Prague. In his research, Dr. Petrů has been focusing on the interaction of politics, ethnicity, and religion in Indonesia and the Malay world. He has authored two dozen articles and chapters on Indonesian, Malaysian and wider Southeast Asian history and politics (*Asian Ethnicity*, *Moussons*, *Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies*, etc.). His publications include the edited volume *Graffiti, Converts and Vigilantes: Islam outside the Mainstream in Maritime Southeast Asia* (Vienna: Caesarpress 2015) and the co-edited volume *Imaginations and Historiographies of Contested Regions: Transforming Centers and Peripheries in Asian and Middle Eastern Contexts* (Prague: Oriental Institute, 2020).

China's massive economic-political influence connected to Belt-and-Road projects, often resulting in a debt trap and other forms of dependence on the PRC, remains a contentious problem for a number of Asian nations. This lecture will analyze the development of China-Malaysia ties, which have evolved from a once-special friendship during the premiership of Najib Razak (2009-18) to a relationship that has gone somewhat awry after the PM's ruling coalition lost General Election 14 in 2018. Overall, the bilateral relationship seems more difficult to assess today, as the prevalent public narrative on both sides is one of mutual cooperation and mutually beneficial ties. This holds true, to a degree, as the trade exchange remains robust, and people-to-people and business-to-business relations are vivid. At the same time, there are many problematic issues to be dealt with such as scrapped or postponed BRI projects or China's infringement on Malaysian waters. These are often solved privately, and Malaysian top-level criticism has traditionally been mild, with officials deferring to China, "playing it safe". The increased assertiveness or even brashness of recent Chinese posture, however, has become a source of concern among many Malaysian politicians and citizens alike. While the Malaysian side has at times been able to show firmness and negotiate better conditions for previously overpriced megaprojects or stopped some extremely unfavorable schemes, Malaysia still seeks balance to keep China on the friendly side, while cautiously hedging against its encroachment in the South China Sea.

This event will be held via zoom.
Please contact Prof. Dr. Viola
Thimm to register
(viola.thimm@fau.de).