Just Business? Government Sanctions Versus Corporate Interests in Europe-China Relations in the 1990s
by Mr Laurens Corstiaan Aizo HEMMINGA (Presenter 1, 3:00 - 3:45 pm)
PhD Candidate, Department of Asian International Studies

ABSTRACT: Today, China and the collective of countries in the European Union between them maintain one of the world’s largest trade relations. It is hard to imagine that less than 30 years ago the countries of what was then the European Economic Community collectively ‘froze’ relations with China, but this is what happened after the very public and violent crackdown of peaceful protestors on Tiananmen Square and elsewhere in China in June 1989. This research asks how the present-day pattern of Europe-China relations results from the exit of the low point after June 1989 and what role European companies’ ties to the PRC government played in this development. Two theoretical frameworks will guide the analysis. Puhani’s two-level game framework will be used to explain how the Chinese government used European corporate interests to break through a ‘gentlemen’s agreement’ between European governments to shun China after the crackdown. Historical institutionalism will be used to explain how this pattern subsequently became solidified and institutionalized. Primary data for this research will be drawn from archives of European MFA’s, public government sources and interviews with government officials and company personnel.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER: Laurens Hemminga is a PhD candidate at the Department of Asian and International Studies, City University of Hong Kong. He received his degrees from Groningen University (MA in International Relations) and the University of Leuven (MSc in Policy Economics). His research interests include Europe-China relations, and Chinese and European foreign affairs.

Changing Roles of Civil Society during the Political Transition of Myanmar
by Ms Aye Yu THWE (Presenter 2, 3:45 - 4:30 pm)
PhD Candidate, Department of Asian International Studies

ABSTRACT: Civil society is a form of collective action by people representing and serving the community, covering a variety of non-profit organizations and performing different roles such as contention, mediation and cooperation. The political transition in Myanmar from authoritarian to democracy has revealed new kinds of civil society groups. Due to the political constraints and legal restrictions of the military regime, there were two major types of civil society organizations (CSOs): activists and developmental based CSOs. The former confronted the military regime for democracy and human rights while the latter worked at a low profile for the community as non-profit, non-political organizations to avoid government scrutiny. Since the Myanmar top-down political transition, CSOs have adapted their activities. Some have engaged the government by cooperating with them while some continue to confront the state using the newly established democratic space. Although many civil society groups have liberal aims, others call for illiberal changes, particularly relating to issues of national identity and religion. Hence, this qualitative research will explore the reasons and ways civil society roles and activities changed since the transition by interviewing their members and comparing their activities before and after 2011. In explaining those changes in civil society, particular emphasis will put on how civil society changes from a transgressive posture towards the regime with liberal democratic aims before 2011 to an often symbiotic attitude to the state and sometimes also abandoned liberal objectives. New CSOs in Myanmar now include symbiotic liberal groups (elections support and peace mediation groups), transgressive liberal (environmental CSOs) and transgressive illiberal (radical monk associations).

ABOUT THE SPEAKER: Aye Yu Thwe is a second-year doctoral student in the Department of Asia and International Studies of the City University of Hong Kong. She is working on her PhD dissertation under the supervision of Professor Mark R. Thompson. She earned a Master of Social Science in Development Studies from the same department in 2009. She received Diploma in Political Science from Yangon University in 2015 and Bachelor of Nursing Science from Yangon Nursing University in 2000. She has fifteen years of working experiences including elections, conflicts and disaster management, bilateral aid, and development in Myanmar. She is a fully accredited facilitator of Building Resource in Democracy, Governance, and Elections (BRIDGE). Her thesis topic is ‘The changing roles of civil society during Myanmar political transition.’ She can be contacted at ayethwe2@c@my.cityu.edu.hk.

Defence Diplomacy and Maritime Security in Southeast Asia: Building Regional Resilience through Capacity
by Mr Olli Pekka SUORSA (Presenter 3, 4:35 - 5:30 pm)
PhD Candidate, Department of Asian International Studies

ABSTRACT: The maritime domain forms a vital geostrategic space in Southeast Asia. It divides the continental from the maritime Southeast Asia, and is a key conduit for commerce and communication between states within the region. This very same domain, however, also poses serious traditional and nontraditional security challenges that range from heated disputes over maritime boundaries to piracy, terrorism at sea, trafficking in people, arms and drugs, and from illegal fishing to environmental disasters. Due to the transboundary nature of many of these challenges, states have had to find ways to cooperate in addressing the threats arising from their shared maritime space; even as the regional geostrategic balance remains fluid. To address the myriad maritime security challenges in the region, this presentation looks at Southeast Asia’s core states’ naval capability and capacity building efforts at the national, bilateral, and multilateral levels. Defence diplomacy at bilateral and multilateral levels is used as an analytical tool to explain small states’ military cooperation towards greater regional resilience in addressing the shared maritime security threats through capacity building programs. The gains and future prospects of this collaboration are highlighted in Southeast Asia’s sub-regional initiatives such as the Malacca Straits Patrol and the Sulu Sea Patrols.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER: Mr Olli Suorsa is a PhD candidate at the Department of Asian and International Studies, City University of Hong Kong, with research interests in Asian security and regional civil-military relations. His doctoral thesis covers defence diplomacy and security construction in Southeast Asia. Mr Suorsa received his degrees from the Tallinn Technological University, in Estonia, (BA on International Relations) and SOAS, in London, UK (MSc on Asian Politics). Mr Suorsa has previously worked in the defence and military aerospace industries.