

2021  
Research Student Seminar Series**Date** : 13 September 2021 (Monday)**Time** : 3:30 to 6:00 pm**Venue** : Register in advance for this zoom meeting:[https://cityu.zoom.us/join/register/tJAlcumgrTwoGN1spzWm6Sg3s\\_6VyPp2-UKR](https://cityu.zoom.us/join/register/tJAlcumgrTwoGN1spzWm6Sg3s_6VyPp2-UKR)*After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.*

## *The Production of Inequality in Hong Kong and Singapore*

*by Mr CHAN Ka Lok (Presenter 1, 3:30 - 4:15 pm)*

*PhD Candidate, Department of Asian International Studies*

**ABSTRACT:** Over the last decade, the work of prominent scholars such as Thomas Piketty and Branko Milanovic has drawn attention to the study of inequality as a global phenomenon. While inequality is now recognised both within and between countries, perhaps one of the most interesting phenomena in recent times has been the rise of inequality in advanced economies and the simultaneous arrival of new forms of “populist” politics. This study focuses on inequality and novel forms of politics in Hong Kong and Singapore; places celebrated for their high per capita incomes but which also exhibit high levels of inequality and increasingly tense forms of politics that variously include serious social unrest, increasing xenophobia and novel forms of nativism. Notably, Hong Kong’s Gini coefficient reached a staggering 0.539 in 2016, with the city characterised by world-leading costs of living, a shortage of public housing, social immobility within and across generations, an ageing population and a surfeit of working poor. In 2018 Singapore’s Gini coefficient – while lower than Hong Kong’s – was still a very high 0.458. While the government has utilised progressive transfers and public housing to offset inequality challenges somewhat, the country remains wracked by foreign labour dependency and large numbers of working poor (including amongst its ageing population). While existing studies have looked at inequality in both places, very few have delved into the political economy of producing inequality in both places, joining this up to the emergence of the novel forms of politics noted above. Employing social conflict theory, this study investigates the degree to which social conflict, state-capital relations and the structural conditions attending globalising capitalism have shaped policy agendas around maintaining competitiveness in both Hong Kong and Singapore, in turn altering the leverage and, indeed, consciousness of certain social forces at the very centre of inequality’s production and mitigation.

**ABOUT THE SPEAKER:** Chan Ka Lok is a second-year PhD student in Asian and International Studies at the City University of Hong Kong. His research interests are Political Economy and Asian Development, specifically economic inequalities.



## *European Union-China Relations Change: A Tale of Networks and Identities*

*by Mr Alexis Lucien Didier LEGGERI (Presenter 2, 4:15 - 5:00 pm)*

*PhD Candidate, Department of Asian International Studies*

**ABSTRACT:** Since 2019, the European Union (EU)-China relations have reached an unprecedented level of tension and transformed into a complex mix of rivalry and cooperation. However, no critical juncture happened, substantial economic ties remain, and common interests exist. Furthermore, beyond a simple rise of tensions, the “China issue” has been instrumental in the EU’s departure from its traditional liberal stance in terms of discourse and practice. In other words, while China follows its own course of transformation, without much interference from the EU, Beijing has become a key aspect of the ongoing transformation of the EU’s identity. Given the importance of the EU-China relations to world politics and the US-China relations, it is worth understanding why and how such a deep and unexpected change is unraveling.

Drawing from International Relations, Social Psychology, and Sociology literature, I will attempt to make sense of this change by analyzing the interaction among the dynamics of the material and ideational realms. I will argue that China’s rise has partly reshaped the global political, economic, and ideational networks making up the structure of world politics. Such new network configurations have curtailed the EU’s agency and generated a disconnect between Brussels’ self-legitimizing aspirational identity, as a security/prosperity provider and liberal norms promoter, and its international role, as a normative power. As a result, the European policy makers’ cognitive environment has undergone a transformation, which has helped make room for new identities/interests/practices to prevail and bring about change in the relationship and the European identity.

**ABOUT THE SPEAKER:** Alexis Leggeri is a PhD candidate specializing in EU-China relations. His work appeared in *The Diplomat*, *Modern Diplomacy*, and a collective book on the Belt and Road Initiative.

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## Challenging the US-led World Order? The Contradictions between China's International Ambition and Domestic Politics

by Ms LIU Peng (Presenter 3, 5:15 - 6:00 pm)

PhD Candidate, Department of Asian International Studies

**ABSTRACT:** So far, there has not been any consensus on whether China is capable of challenging American power. Much discussion under this theme has primarily focused on comparing the national power of China and the US, particularly in the military and economic spheres. Meanwhile, many scholars have recognized the importance of investigating and analyzing the limits of China's rise and what obstacles it must overcome in order to assess its capacity to challenge the US-led world order in the foreseeable future. Many participants in this debate have addressed Chinese domestic constraints and argued that China's rise would stall or stop before it can turn into a hegemonic power. However, as China is often portrayed as a unitary and "black box" actor in existing literature, the attention paid to the roles of different units within the party-state in China's domestic and international politics is far from sufficient. This study investigates how domestic politics affect China's policy orientation and implementation, and subsequently its capacity to challenge the US-led world order. This study focuses on three aspects of China's domestic politics — the political survival of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the relations between central and local governments, and between the state and state-owned enterprises (SOEs). The core argument of this study is that the CCP's political survival, the nature of China's central-local and state-SOE relations constrain the party-state's capacity to challenge the US-led world order.

**ABOUT THE SPEAKER:** Liu Peng is a doctoral student in the Department of Asian and International Studies at the City University of Hong Kong. She holds a Bachelor of Management Sciences in Labor Relations and a Master of Arts in International Studies. Her research interests include Chinese domestic politics and world order.