

AIS General Research Fund (GRF) and Early Career Scheme (ECS) Success Round 2020-21

Project Title:

The Political Economy of China's involvements in Kazakhstan: state interests, social conflicts, and economic cooperation

Brief Abstract:

This project seeks to give the first comprehensive picture of the political economy of China's involvements in Kazakhstan over the past three decades, particularly since the introduction of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013. The research is justified by Kazakhstan's geo-strategic location for China to connect to Eurasia and the increasing co-existence of conflicts and cooperation between China and Kazakhstan. The analysis draws on two strands of the International Political Economy theories. First, the growing body of research on asymmetric state-to-state relations explains that a strong country such as China has limited attention to devote to a weaker one such as Kazakhstan, meaning that even though there is a massive power imbalance, China is likely to recognise Kazakhstan's autonomy, and Kazakhstan is expected to show deference. But China's BRI has given Kazakhstan more leverage to punch above its weight, and more risks to engage in a wider range of activities with China. Second, social conflict theory argues that states are increasingly fragmented, and the co-existence of conflicts and cooperation can only be explained by investigating the sub-national dynamics and how they shape national policy on the ground. These two sets of state-to-state and sub-national hypotheses will be tested in part through systematic tracing of state-level and sub-national dynamics by desktop research of national speeches, government reports, and local newspapers in China and Kazakhstan. This will be supplemented and triangulated by fieldwork to investigate the reality on the ground of Chinese involvements in Kazakhstan, featuring in-depth interviews with local stakeholders, industrial practitioners, and focus groups.

Investigator: Dr Linda Yin-Nor TJIA

Biography:

Linda Yin-nor TJIA is a political economist who specializes in China's infrastructure and logistics development, as well as their impact on the domestic society and engaging countries. Her solely authored book on Explaining Railway Reform in China was published under the Routledge Contemporary Chinese Series. She also publishes book chapters and peer reviewed articles in China Journal, Asian Survey, Journal of Transport History, International Social Work and Journal of Social Entrepreneurship. Tjia received her doctoral degree at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. Prior to her academic endeavors, she has extensive working experience in the railway and logistics sector in Hong Kong and the Mainland.