

# AIS General Research Fund (GRF) and Early Career Scheme (ECS) Success Round 2018-19

**Project Title:** Environmental Protests and Political Change in Authoritarian Regimes: The Case of Vietnam

**Brief Abstract:**

The project seeks to capture the role and consequences of the growing number of environmental protests in Vietnam, which are widely reported in the local press and which suggest significant change in the state-society relationship in the 14th most populous country in the world. So far, environmental protests in Vietnam have surprisingly drawn very little attention in the academic literature.

Reports about environmental protests have become common in the Vietnamese press, which is surprising in an authoritarian regime in which protests are generally viewed as a threat and the media is controlled by the state. Preliminary research shows that quite a few reports are primarily factual and are not biased against the protesters. Instead, the companies responsible for the environmental pollution or local officials are often blamed for the protests. However, in some instances, the reporting changes significantly and becomes heavily biased against the environmental activists. This demonstrates that there are different competing discourses surrounding environmental protests about which relatively little is known.

The project will fill this gap. It will collect all reports about environmental protests in major Vietnamese newspapers since the early 2000s and use an interpretive content analysis to determine different discourses in the texts. This will be combined with case studies of three to four protests that were reported very differently in the press. The field research will primarily rely on interviews with journalists and editors as well as government officials and activists, who will provide background information about what may have been left out of the reports. This will allow the researcher to determine differences in the media perception from those of observers and participants. The changing discourse of environmental protests will make it possible to indicate political changes in the country and the context in which those occur.

**Investigator:** Dr Stephan ORTMANN

**Biography:**

Dr Stephan ORTMANN is a scholar interested in political transformations in the context of societal changes. He has explored different social movements including the democracy movement in Hong Kong and Singapore as well as environmental movements in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Vietnam. The rise of activism is often tied to socio-political changes that reveal deeper insights about the transformation of these countries. His publications have appeared in many prominent academic journals including Asian Survey, China Quarterly, Journal of Democracy, Pacific Review, State and Society, and Government and Opposition. He is also the author of *Managed Crisis: Legitimacy and the National Threat in Singapore* (VDM, 2009), *Politics and Change in Singapore and Hong Kong: Containing Contention* (Routledge, 2010) and *Environmental Governance in Vietnam: Institutional Reforms and Failures* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).