

## ICS International Workshop “Taiwan’s New Southbound Policy in Comparative Perspective”



Presenters of the workshop. (From left) Dr. Hoo Chiew Ping, Dr. Dong-Ching Day, Dr. Rahul Misra, Dr. Ngeow Chow Bing, Dr. Wu-Ping Kuo, Dr. Zhang Yuanpeng and Dr. Ma Bo.

On 18 January 2018, the Institute of China Studies (ICS) of the University of Malaya co-organized with Nanhua University of Taiwan an International Workshop titled “Taiwan’s New Southbound Policy in Comparative Perspective.” 7 speakers from Malaysia, Mainland China, Taiwan and India presented their papers in this workshop.

In the first panel on the political economy of Taiwan’s New Southbound Policy, Professor Day Dong-Ching of Nanhua University presented a paper titled “Asia-Pacific Economic Integration and Its Challenges to Taiwan: From the Perspective of Identity.” Professor Day argues that identity is a major factor driving economic regionalism and Taiwan would have to overcome the challenges post by the identity issue. Dr Ma Bo of Nanjing University then analyzed Taiwan’s New Southbound Policy from the Mainland China perspective. He explained that the Chinese government does not see this policy as threatening but it is meant to promote Taiwan Independence then this could be seen as a threat. Dr. Ngeow Chow Bing of ICS discusses the implementation of the New Southbound Policy focusing on Malaysia, in the economic and cultural sphere.

The second panel provides a comparative angle by examining similar regional initiatives. Professor Zhang Yuanpeng from Jiangsu Academy of Social Sciences discussed China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the cross-straits cooperation possible under this initiative. Professor Kuo Wu-Ping of Nanhua University compared the Belt and Road Initiative with Russia’s Eurasian Economic Union. Professor Kuo contend that BRI has the potential to transform the economic relationship between China and member states of Eurasian Economic Union, making China their number one economic partner, which could undermine Russia’s economic interests. Dr Hoo Chiew-Ping of

the National University of Malaya analyzed the New Southern Policy of the Republic of Korea under President Moon Jae-In. She pointed out that Republic of Korea does not have a consistent policy towards Southeast Asia. However driven by concerns of its relationship with Northeast Asian neighbors, President Moon is determined to diversify South Korea’s foreign policy focus by engaging more with Southeast Asian countries. Finally, Dr Rahul Mishra, who is from India and currently attached to the Asia-Europe Institute of University of Malaya, presented a paper on India’s Act East Policy. He outlined the different phases of the previous Look East Policy and the new measures under the Act East Policy and the prospects of greater cooperation between India, Taiwan, and Southeast Asian countries. ◆



Section of audience during the workshop

## Proposal Workshop “Malaysian Voices in the Malaysia-China Relationship”



The sponsors and the presenters of the workshop. From left: Dr. Vincent Kam (Chief Executive Officer of United MAEX Sdn Bhd), Dr. Ngeow Chow Bing, Mr. He Yifeng (Co-founder of United MAEX Sdn Bhd), Datuk Professor Dr. Danny Wong Tze Ken, Dr. Cheong Kee Cheok and Ms. Wang Qianyi

ICS organized a proposal workshop on “Malaysian Voices in the Malaysia-China Relationship” on 9 March 2018 with sponsorship from United MAEX Sdn Bhd. The workshop brainstormed and solicited opinions and suggestions for a research proposal to examine the role of the major Malaysian stakeholders in the shaping of Malaysia-China relations. Professor Danny Wong Tze-Ken of the University of Malaya made a presentation on the different phases of Malaysia-China historically. Dr Ngeow Chow Bing of ICS discussed the role of the Malaysian Rubber Industry community in Malaysia-China relations, specifically addressing the topic of Rubber Diplomacy. Professor Cheong Kee Cheok and Dr. Wang Qianyi of University of Malaya and the principal investigators of this project discussed the analytical framework and research purpose of this project.



Dr. Cheong Kee Cheok and Ms. Wang Qianyi discussed the analytical framework and research purpose



Participants at the workshop



Tan Sri Koh Tsu Koon raising questions to the speakers

## International Workshop “Facing the North Korea Challenge: Southeast Asia and China”



The presenters of the workshop. From left: Dr. Richard Javad Heydarian, Dr. Chheang Vanarith, Dr. Ngeow Chow Bing, Dr. Hoo Chiew Ping and Dr. Kim Jong-Nam

On 18 April 2018, the Institute of China Studies (ICS) of the University of Malaya co-organized with East Asian International Relations (EAIR) CAUCUS, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia an International Workshop titled “Facing the North Korea Challenge: Southeast Asia and China”. North Korea’s nuclear and missiles programs have been one of the most intricate strategic issues in recent years. China is North Korea’s most important neighbor and also its economic lifeline, but North Korea has also created substantial trouble for China’s geopolitical interests. On the other hand, North Korea has maintained various kinds of close relationship with Southeast Asian countries.

This workshop was organized to illustrate the challenges in dealing with North Korea, comparing the experiences of China and Southeast Asia. Dr Chheang Vanarith of Cambodia Institute of Peace and Cooperation reviewed the historical ties between Cambodia and North Korea, especially the close personal relations between the Cambodian royal family and the Kim family in North Korea. In more contemporary period, Cambodia continues to be one of the major facilitators of North Korea’s international transactions, legal and illegal. Vanarith also discusses the importance of China factor in Cambodia’s policy towards North Korea.

Dr Ngeow Chow-Bing from ICS discussed the recent developments of China-North Korea relations in light of the fluid developments in the Korean peninsula. He argued that these developments present both opportunities and challenges to China’s strategic interests, and if China does not change its North Korea policy, the trajectories of the developments may eventually undermine China’s interests. Dr Hoo Chiew-Ping from the National University of Malaysia discussed North Korea’s relations with Malaysia. Dr Hoo discussed the historical background of the relationship and the recent turn of events following the assassination of Kim Jong-Nam in Malaysia by North Korean operatives, illustrating the dilemma the Malaysian government face in engaging the erratic North Korean regime. Richard Javad Heydarian, a Manila-based academic, recently visited Pyongyang under a Southeast Asian think tank delegation. He shared his

experiences in Pyongyang and the interaction he had with North Korean officials. Finally, Lee Jae-Hong from the Asan Institute of South Korea presented a comprehensive overview of the security relations between South Korea and Southeast Asia and how both sides can cooperate to manage the North Korea challenge.



The two panels during the workshop



## Cambodian Perspective on China

Vannarith Chheang



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*China is regarded as the core economic and strategic partner as Cambodia is thriving to diversify its sources of economic growth, modernize and connect its infrastructure, and integrate its economy with the region and the world at large, said Vannarith Chheang.*

Cambodia and China celebrate their 60th anniversary of diplomatic ties this year. Last year, President Xi Jinping said, "Both sides should take the commemoration of the 60th anniversary as an opportunity to promote bilateral relations for steady, forward-looking and better development." Prime Minister Hun Sen responded, "The Cambodian side is willing to, together with the Chinese side, consolidate traditional friendship, so as to promote bilateral comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership for greater development."

Cambodia, the natural ally of China in the region, views the evolving regional order as leading to a Sino-centric order. Cambodia's worldview is that the world will become a multipolar world in which China is one of the main poles. In Asia, China will be a dominant major power. In the eyes of the Cambodian ruling elites, China will significantly shape global and regional order based on China's evolving rules and values.

Cambodia regards China as the most important strategic and economic partner, while China regards Cambodia as the most reliable friend in Southeast Asia. Both countries share a historical memory of being humiliated by Western powers. Special personal friendship cultivated by Prince Norodom Sihanouk and Premier Zhou Enlai in late 1950s is the bedrock of the bilateral ties. The personal relationship between the leaders of the two countries has been nurtured from generation to generation.

China's support is critical to realizing Cambodia's development vision of becoming a middle-income country by 2030 and high-income country by 2050. Infrastructure development and national and regional connectivity projects are the key areas of bilateral cooperation. The flow of Chinese investment capital and tourists has contributed to socio-economic development and poverty reduction in Cambodia.

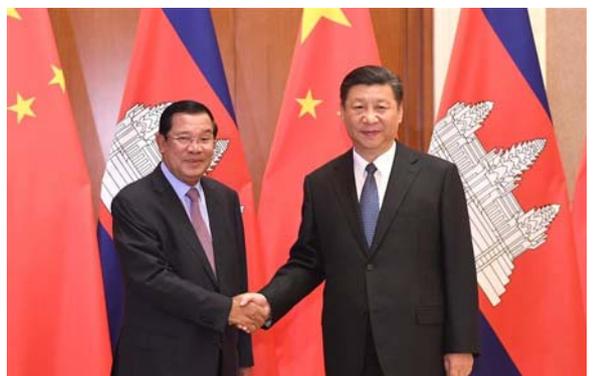
Historically, Cambodia approached extra-regional powers to counterbalance against existential threats posed by two big immediate neighbors. After becoming an ASEAN member in 1999, Cambodia has become more confident in regional integration and community building. The non-interference principle and consensus-based decision-making mode of ASEAN are the key international relations norms that Cambodia can rely on to protect itself from its neighbors. Although threat perception has gradually diminished, Cambodia remain view her immediate neighbors as main security and sovereignty threats. Territorial disputes between

Cambodia and its neighbors remain the key security concerns. Cambodia-Vietnam territorial tension and the flow of Vietnamese migrants to Cambodia are the most complex issue, due to domestic politics and anti-Vietnam nationalism in Cambodia.

The majority of Cambodians still perceive Vietnam as the core threat. Cambodian political leaders, both from the ruling party and opposition party, regard China as the most reliable global power to assist Cambodia to counterbalance with Thailand and Vietnam, through both economic and security means. Hun Sen has shifted his political alliance with Hanoi to Beijing, particularly since 2010 when Cambodia signed comprehensive strategic partnership with China. The strategic and political trust that Cambodia has earned from China serves as a foundation of forging closer ties between the two countries. China is now the core backup of Cambodia.

The Cambodian government under the leadership of the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) views China as the main source for regime legitimization. China's development aid and investments have significantly contributed to the output and performance legitimacy of the government. From 1994 to 2016, the total investment capital from China was about \$14.7 billion, concentrated on four sectors – the agriculture and agro-industry, the industrial sector, physical infrastructure and services and tourism.. Chinese investments to Cambodia are mainly driven by deep political trust, cheap labor, abundant natural resources, and market access to the US, European Union and ASEAN.

The Cambodian government prioritizes output-based legitimacy (economic growth and infrastructure development) over input-based legitimacy (democratic participation in development and choosing political leadership). Cambodia perceives that China's 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI) will enhance its own infrastructure construction and economic development, while enhancing its capacity to play more relevant role



Chinese President Xi Jinping (R) meets with Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen in Beijing, capital of China, May 17, 2017

Source: Courtesy of Xinhuanet

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Chinese Ambassador to Cambodia Bu Jianguo (front) delivers a speech during a handover ceremony of medical equipment to Cambodia's Military Hospital in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, Dec. 17, 2015.

Source: Courtesy of Xinhuanet

in regional integration and community. Cambodia needs about US\$700 million per year to develop infrastructure such as roads, bridges, power grid, and irrigation system to maintain high economic growth.

To sustain its development, Cambodia needs to quickly and effectively grasp emerging opportunities deriving from ASEAN economic integration, the New Development Bank (NDB), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the BRI initiative, and other projects and funds including Silk Road Fund and China-ASEAN Maritime Cooperation Fund. Cambodia is capitalizing on these opportunities to concretize its development priorities. It hopes that it will be able to receive part of these loans for investing in its new infrastructure projects. There is a strong belief that BRI will reinforce connectivity within the country and connect Cambodia with other countries.

On the South China Sea issue, Cambodia shares similar position with China that bilateral mechanism is the most effective way in resolving the differences and disputes, and ASEAN-China dialogue mechanism is a tool to build mutual understanding and trust. The Code of Conduct (COC) is not an instrument to resolve conflicts or disputes, but a way to build confidence and promote preventive diplomacy. Cambodia is not interested in internationalizing the South China Sea issue, and is cautiously constraining other claimants such as Vietnam and the Philippines from using ASEAN to directly counter or challenge China. Cambodia's views and position on the South China Sea have earned significant political and strategic capital from China.

Opportunities, however, do not come without challenges. The structural challenge that Cambodia may need to overcome is power asymmetry. Economic overdependence on China poses certain constraints on Cambodia's foreign policy options. Cambodia's image and role in ASEAN has been affected due to its position on the South China Sea, which is in line with that of China. The US and Japan have expressed their dissatisfaction with Cambodia over the South China Sea issue. The US is planning to add a new condition to its development assistance to Cambodia by requesting Cambodia to take "effective steps to strengthen regional security and stability, particularly regarding territorial disputes in the South China Sea".

Chinese economic presence may cause certain public discontent if the investment and infrastructure development projects are not inclusive - i.e., adversely affecting the local

livelihood and environment. Some civil society and grassroots organizations have raised concerns with regard to Chinese investment projects, particularly with regard to the issues of resettlement and compensation, environmental degradation, and land grabbing. The public concerns over the influx of Chinese investors (especially in casino industry) and tourists to Sihanoukville reflect rising public discontent in Cambodia against too much, too fast Chinese presence in the Kingdom.

To conclude, Cambodia's view of China has been determined by historical memory, personal friendship, imagined shared destiny, economic interests, output legitimacy and regime stability, and the perceived threats caused by immediate neighbors. Close ties with China present more opportunities and benefits than costs and risks. In Phnom Penh, China is regarded as the core economic and strategic partner, as Cambodia is thriving to diversify its sources of economic growth, modernize and connect its infrastructure, and integrate its economy with the region and the world at large. Betting on China to be a dominant power in Asia has also shaped Cambodia's view and approach towards China. ♦

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*This article is the personal opinion of the writer.*

## RETURN TO MAO-TYPE DICTATORSHIP? NOT QUITE THE SAME

*Ngeow Chow Bing*



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The mainstream narrative, at least outside of China, on the recent constitutional amendment that removed the term limits of the Presidency of the People's Republic of China, has been one of overwhelming disapproval. According to this narrative, even before the constitutional change Xi Jinping has been as power-hungry as Chairman Mao Zedong, indicated by the immense consolidation of power into his hand and the development of a cult of personality. What was assuring was the term-limit of the presidency, which was perhaps the only institutional check on the power of any top Chinese leader. Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao both obeyed the term-limit. Succession of leadership was made not only possible and orderly. Mao-type dictatorship was thought to be long-gone. The term-limit, together with other written and unwritten rules, represented a trend of institutionalization of elite politics in China that made the authoritarian system more predictable and enduring. Hence, according to this narrative, Xi's removal of the term limit is a tremendous setback, and all signs are pointing towards Xi becoming the next Mao.

Other than Mao, Xi has also been compared with Putin, or just some nameless Good/Bad Emperors of the past. Essentially, Xi's rule is personalistic and is de-institutionalizing the political system and is dangerous to both China and to the world.

While there is truth in this narrative, it also simplifies the complexity of Chinese elite politics and the nature of Xi Jinping's leadership. Many contextual factors are ignored, and the dangers are possibly exaggerated. The best reference point to start about Xi's accumulation of power is neither Mao Zedong nor Deng Xiaoping, nor Putin; it has a lot more to do with the politics during Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao.

### ***Can Xi accumulate power without the support of the Party?***

The first point about comparison with Mao (or Deng) is that Xi Jinping when Xi assumed power, he was widely seen as a compromise candidate between the so-called Jiang faction and Hu faction. Unlike Mao or Deng, Xi assumed the top leadership position without any revolutionary or state-building credentials; in fact some China watchers dismissed him as likely a weak leader. Xi's father was a senior figure in the government of Deng era, his factional base was not clear, and he had at most a solid performance as local and provincial career. With such undistinguished beginning, Xi went on to become the most powerful leader of China since Mao. It begs the question of "how is it possible?"

The answer could be that Xi was extremely skilful in elite politics and in knocking down his rivals and concealing these skills before he was appointed to the top, and once he was on the top he showed his power-hungry side. Or, the more likely case is that he is powerful because

the Party has enabled him to become that powerful. Throughout the five years since Xi rose to the top, Xi still had to operate within a collective leadership system, surrounded by powerful officials in their own right. Could Xi have just coerced his powerful colleagues into acquiescing to his accumulation of power? Or could it be the case that Xi got to this stage because the Party actually has a consensus to enable him to become this powerful. If it is the latter, the next question is, why? To answer this question, we need to look back to elite politics of Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao eras.

### ***Deng Xiaoping's rules after the Cultural Revolution***

After experiencing the Cultural Revolution, Deng Xiaoping imposed a set of rules, most notably ending the life-time tenure of all officials, the term-limit for the Presidency and age-limit for senior officials and cadres, to prevent another possibility of Mao. Over the years, other rules developed, so a nascent institutionalization of the elite politics was underway. These rules included early appointment of potential successors into the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC), division of labour and power within the collective leadership, the balance of provincial and factional interests in the composition of the Politburo and PSC, the regular convening of party congresses and plenums at predictable intervals, and so forth. These rules, developed by Deng and his colleagues, made sense during his time; they stabilized the leadership, defined the parameters of the game of elite politics, and ensured relatively smooth succession processes later.

But the institutionalization was not complete, and one of the most glaring shortcomings was the failure to prevent active interference by veteran leaders. In Chinese dynastic history, there was this tradition of a supposedly Retired Emperor (called Taishanghuang) still overseeing the works of the Emperor (Emperors Qianlong and Jiaqing during the Qing Dynasty being the most famous example), making decisive intervention when necessary. During the PRC era, Mao once ostensibly retired from active politics to hand over the government to his trusted lieutenants Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, but in fact continued to intervene. Deng ended life-time tenure formally but he himself continued to intervene in politics as a supposed retired leader. One of his early institutional creations was to legitimize the interference of veteran leaders –the Central Advisory Commission (1982-1992). Some of his interventions proved to be a masterful blessing of China, most famous of all the Nanxun in 1992, but it was still a case of interference nonetheless. Jiang Zemin continued the pattern, refusing to hand over the Chair of Central Military Commission to Hu Jintao until two years after he handed over the top party and state posts, and afterwards still continued to interfere actively during Hu's era. Term-limit did not

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prevent this perennial problem of intervention by veteran leaders.

### ***Xi's leadership in the context of Hu Jintao era***

Xi and his generation of leaders benefitted much from these rules personally; but they also observed closely how these rules became the limitations and could cripple the leadership. This was particularly acute in Hu's era. For the first five years of Hu he ruled under the shadow of his predecessor Jiang Zemin, and for the next five years he ruled under the shadow of his successor, Xi himself. On top of that, the collective leadership, designed to overcome centralization of power, itself became the basis to develop so-called "independent kingdoms" where abuses of power were more rampant, the kind shown by the disgraced former PSC member Zhou Yongkang and the internal security apparatus under his command. In the eyes of Xi and the current cohort of party leaders, the rules imposed by Deng made sense after the Cultural Revolution years, but they have become excessively inhibitive of effective leadership over the years. Hu Jintao was weak because of these rules.

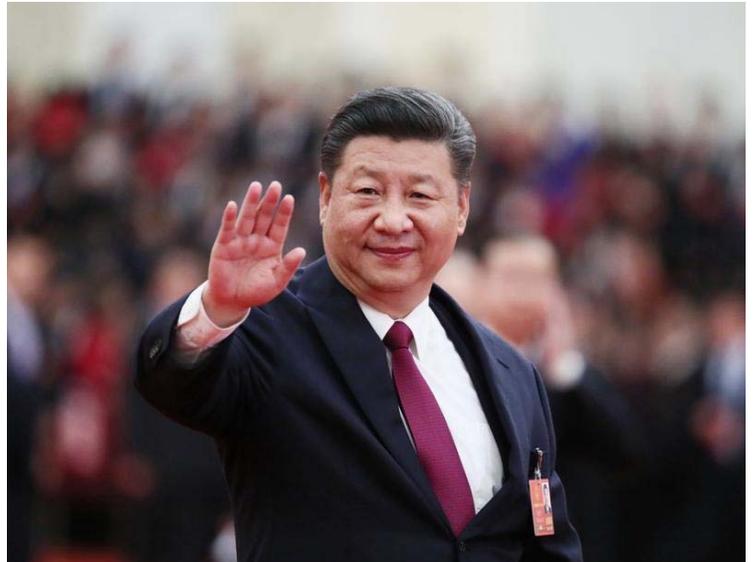
Arguably Hu was unhappy about his weak power but he could do nothing about it. He chose to completely retire when he handed over all positions to Xi Jinping, and it was Hu's complete retirement that has set the basic stage for Xi to consolidate power. Xi had to clean up the messes accumulated during the time of Hu during the first five years, but he was very grateful to Hu for setting the precedent of ending the active intervention by retired leaders. After observing the ills of Hu's administration, Xi and this generation of leaders began to dismantle the rules of the Deng era, including overhauling the collective leadership system to make it more tightly bounded, and in the 19th Party Congress, refusing to appoint successor candidates into the PSC. In other words, Xi changed the rules and consolidated immense power, but likely with the consensus of other party leaders.

The removal of the presidential term-limit in this context is a logical step. Xi is pursuing an agenda that takes more than ten years to complete, including economic transformation, the race in AI, Industry 4.0, the Belt and Road Initiative, and so forth, and most party leaders are behind him on these agenda. If Xi will have to step down in 2022, he may have the impulse to interfere as a veteran leader again. The removal of the term-limit actually allows him to see out his agenda legally and formally. In this sense it is actually an institutionalization of the political system rather than de-institutionalization. Xi is also assembling an all-star cast of capable and ambitious officials that has not seen in the Hu era, including Liu He, Wang Qishan, Yang Jieci, Wang Yang, Wang Huning, and so forth. In the eyes of Xi and his colleagues, it would be a pity that they have to step down without accomplishing what they want to do because of Deng's era rules.

### ***Removal of term-limit = life-time tenure?***

Finally, the removal of term-limit does not mean life-time tenure. By comparing Xi with Mao, many observers are assuming that Xi wants to have life-time tenure like Mao and other dictators. But Xi may be actually looking at other models, those who ruled for a long period of time with both legality and legitimacy, and eventually stepped down after making achievements. Examples like Mahathir of Malaysia (1981-2003) and Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore (1959-1990) probably are Xi's model rather than Mao. There is of course the danger of Xi staying indefinitely. But if the thesis of this article is correct, that it is essentially the Party that enables Xi to become this powerful, than it is likely that in securing

the support for removing the term-limit Xi would have to make a deal with his colleagues that he will step down after one or two more extra terms, probably around 2032, which is about the mid-term goal in the drive to achieve socialist modernization. Whether such a deal exists or not of course could not be verified, but is not far-fetched. ♦



Chinese President Xi Jinping waves to deputies to the 13th National People's Congress (NPC) in Beijing, capital of China, March 20, 2018.  
Source: Courtesy of Xinhuanet

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**ICS Seminar**  
**“Belt and Road Initiative: China’s  
 Geostrategic Grand Plan or Blue Ocean  
 Strategy for Growth?”**



Mr. Koh King Kee

Mr. Koh King Kee is currently the Director of China Belt and Road Desk, Baker Tilly Advisory Malaysia, an accounting and consultancy firm in Malaysia. He was formerly an Honorary Advisor to the Asia Pacific Economic Research Institute in Beijing. Mr Koh has held senior management positions in banks, multinationals and property development companies. He has worked for over six years in Beijing, including as Chief

Representative of a Malaysian listed corporation in China. In this talk on 13 March 2018, Mr Koh provided an alternative to the conventional view that regard the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as China’s strategic plan dominated to challenge US global hegemony and West world order. Instead, he sees the BRI as an economically-driven global development project, unparalleled in history in terms of the quantum of investment, that will have major impacts on the world economic order. He does not discount the strategic implications, but regard BRI as primarily driven by China’s own economic imperative to move up the global value chain. ♦

**ICS Seminar**  
**“China’s Wartime Everydayness and the  
 Globalization of World War II”**

Professor Hans van de Ven (Professor of Modern Chinese History, Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, Cambridge University, Fellow of the British Academy), a renowned historian on China’s military history, presented a seminar on 20 April 2018 which argues that, from a global perspective, violence did not really end with the formal surrender of Japan in World War II. In many parts of the colonial world, forces empowered and armed in the preceding years, continue to fight foreign as well as domestic competitors for control of their countries. In China, Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalists and Mao Zedong’s Communists had resumed fighting each other well before Japan’s surrender. The number of people there who died as a result of war after 1945 was probably as high, if not higher, than before 1945. A genuinely global understanding of World War II therefore needs to take into account that in large parts of the world, societies mobilized not just to resist German and Japanese aggression, but also to bring the era of Western imperialism to an end and to set themselves unto a new course. The seminar also discussed Japan’s surrender in China on 9 September 1945. And the ways in which World War II was experienced and imagined in China. ♦



Professor Hans van de Ven



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