

LSE Global China Working Group Seminars, WT 2024

Wednesdays, 5-6:30 pm via Zoom and in-person CON 7.05

This seminar is organized by LSE Global China working group. It is for PhD researchers and early career scholars at LSE and beyond working on China and global south related studies. It is a forum for discussions and questions on China in development contexts. Researchers from all theoretical backgrounds and methodological traditions are welcome. This seminar will be hosted in hybrid format, via Zoom <https://lse.zoom.us/j/82109719675> and in-person at LSE Connaught House 7.05.

This is an open-access research group. Please circulate this flyer in your networks to anyone who may be interested. The seminars are open to researchers external to the LSE. If you would like to join the working group, attend the seminar, and/or present in the future, please email Yuezhou Yang (y.yang91@lse.ac.uk).

Our WT 2024 seminars are supported by LSE-Fudan Global Public Policy Hub.

WT 2024

- Wed, 31 Jan **M. Adil Sait**, PhD Candidate in Economic Geography, LSE
'A Tale of Two Chinas in Africa': Multistakeholder perspectives on Chinese involvement in mining for critical raw materials in Namibia
- Wed, 28 Feb **Giulia Sciorati**, LSE Fellow, Department of International Relations
Visualising China's Story in Museum Exhibitions: Insights from the Central State Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan
- Wed, 13 Mar **Ran (Ken) Hu**, Research Associate at Open University
Bringing emotions back in: the politics of emotions in China's infrastructure investment

Abstract

Wed, 31 Jan

‘A Tale of Two Chinas in Africa’: Multistakeholder perspectives on Chinese involvement in mining for critical raw materials in Namibia

M. Adil Sait, PhD Candidate in Economic Geography, LSE

Generalised geopolitical assessments of China’s involvement across diverse African countries characteristically conform to two main stereotypes. The former centres on benefits and opportunities arising from Chinese investment and strategic partnerships. The latter emphasises the perceived costs and uncertainties prompted by China-Africa economic partnerships and initiatives. The ‘New Scramble for Africa’ (circa 2002 – present), and recent debates over mining for critical raw materials (CRMs) such as tin, tungsten, tantalum, lithium, cobalt, and others, has reinforced geopolitical sensitivities and rivalries. However, authentic voices from local stakeholder groups challenge dominant narratives. This paper, emerging from field research in Namibia, Southern Africa centres on competing perspectives of Chinese (and international) involvement in the local mining economy and its implications for African development and policy. It argues that, in the context of emerging global sustainability and technology transitions, greater cooperation and dialogue between different actors is necessary to harness local benefits of mining sector investment.

Bio: Adil Sait is a PhD Candidate at the LSE Department of Geography and Environment and Visiting Research Fellow at the Namibia University of Science and Technology (NUST). Adil’s doctoral research focuses on mining for critical raw materials and its implications for African development, natural resource governance, and regional development policy.

Wed, 28 Feb

Visualising China’s Story in Museum Exhibitions: Insights from the Central State Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan

Giulia Sciorati, LSE Fellow, Department of International Relations

Since the launch of the “Tell the China Story Well” (Jianghao Zhongguo gushi 讲好中国故事) campaign, the study of China’s self-representations to foreign audiences has been placed under the spotlight. Scholars drew connections between the campaign and the country’s discursive power (Huayu quan 话语权), central to China’s outward communication against China threat theory. However, investigations of China’s discursive power through visual self-representation have remained at the margins of the research. This limitation is particularly prominent today when compared with what scholars have identified as the “visual turn” of the Communist Party of China (CPC) – i.e. the CPC’s reliance on visual political communication.

The study aims to start filling this gap by investigating exhibitions held by museums outside China in collaboration with Chinese institutions. I argue that museum exhibitions are a potentially effective tool for promoting specific self-representations because they a) target foreigners with a pre-existing interest in the country and/or its cultural products, and b) are seemingly distant from political élites and political messages to the target audiences.

Drawing from the insights of the social-constructivist school of International Relations theory and, thus, considering the “world as our making”, the study seeks answers to the questions: which

representations of China are presented in museum exhibitions overseas? Which ideas and values are associated with China? Which history and whose historical interpretations are displayed? Answering these questions will offer a more comprehensive understanding of how China exercises discursive power abroad.

To answer these questions, I will present the preliminary findings of a study on the Central State Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan (CSM) in Almaty, which has hosted five exhibitions in collaboration with Chinese institutions since 2009. In light of the centrality of the neighbourhood in China's foreign policy and the country's awareness of its negative reputation among Kazakh civil society, the CSM is a crucial case for how China uses visualities to present an alternative self-representation to foreign audiences.

By examining catalogues and other archival materials and interviewing CSM staff involved in the exhibitions, the research findings will offer empirical evidence on how visualities are used to construct specific visual discourses on China and present them to target audiences, thus strengthening the country's discursive power by other means.

Bio: Giulia Sciorati is an LSE Fellow specialising in China/Global South within the Department of International Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Prior to joining LSE, she worked on the project "The Belt and Road Initiative and the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on China's Global Projection" (BRIICoPIC) as a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow in the Department of Humanities at the University of Trento, Italy. She has also taught modules on Chinese contemporary history, International Relations, and International Security at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan, the University of Pavia, and the School of International Studies at the University of Trento. In a different capacity, Giulia serves as an Associate Research Fellow in the China Programme of the Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI). Her research primarily focuses on the political use of heritage and shared historical memory in foreign policy, specifically emphasising China and Central Asian countries.

Wed, 13 Mar

Bringing emotions back in: the politics of emotions in China's infrastructure investment

Ran (Ken) Hu, Research Associate at Open University

Emotions are often downplayed in the analysis of Chinese investments in infrastructure as the assumption is that infrastructural investment is pursued on the basis of (bounded) rationality which reflects the 'interests' or negotiated interests of the actors who take part in. As such, emotions are explained away by such rational reasoning as economic benefits and geopolitical influences.

However, both the investment process and infrastructure projects are imbued with a spectrum of emotions. For instance, growing discontent with China's (in)action in its Gwardar investments is displayed fully by local protests against the shortage of water and electricity and, even suicide bombing targeting Chinese nationals. Pride and hope are also very present in infrastructure projects such as water supply and railway networks that have long been seen as projects of modernity and civilisation. More importantly, emotions cannot be simply discounted as being flimsy or irrational, as they are embedded in political discourses, and affect the perceptions, motivations, and intentions of all involved parties. Recognising the critical role of emotions reshapes how we think about politics, society, and policy. This paper, therefore, explores the emotional drivers behind China's overseas infrastructure investment, and more importantly, the ways in which these emotions have constituted infrastructure development. Simply, what do these emotions do regarding China's infrastructure development?

Bio: Ken has a PhD in Politics from the University of York (2022). His research focuses on critical International Relations theories, grand strategy, Chinese Foreign (Economic) Policy, and the Indo-Pacific international relations. He is interested in developing an interdisciplinary and cross-regional understanding of Chinese engagements across Europe and their different political and geopolitical implications from a pan-European perspective.