**Tentative date of exchange at USC**

Proposed date: From 1 February 2024 to 1 May 2024 (three months).

**Research Plan**

My dissertation research investigates the evolution of regional security strategy in Southeast Asia. It explores why Southeast Asian policymakers tend to combine elements of discrete practices such as balancing and bandwagoning to navigate security tensions between major powers in the region. The conventional wisdom is that this hybrid approach is a by-product of the changing post-Cold War strategic environment. Uncertainties about America’s commitment to the region and the competition among other Asian powers to fill in the power vacuum have influenced this behaviour. I challenge this understanding and propose that there is a broader historical basis for Southeast Asian strategic thinking. By examining the major transitions in international relations from 1800 to 1978, I identify a recurring pattern, which I term “multiple alignments,” in the way political actors show deference to multiple superordinate actors in an effort to negotiate their position within the international order.

Given my research interest, I believe that a three-month exchange at the Department of Political Science and International Relations (POIR) at the University of Southern California (USC) will be tremendously beneficial for both my dissertation and professional development.

First, I am attracted to POIR’s worldclass faculty and their cutting-edge research in a wide range of areas, including comparative politics and international relations in East and Southeast Asia, which aligns closely with my research area. I appreciate and share POIR’s long-term dedication to address real-world issues that impact global security. My dissertation research, which examines the historical basis of contemporary Southeast Asian security strategy, is one that directly pertains to the management of ongoing tensions between the world’s largest powers, the United States (US) and China. By analysing over two hundred years of Southeast Asian history (c. 1800-1978), I hope to identify the structures and regularities that have shaped Southeast Asian strategic thinking and refine the conceptual tools and ideas that small states can harness to navigate the U.S.-China strategic competition.

Second, USC’s diverse intellectual community makes it an ideal environment for my dissertation research, as it promotes an interdisciplinary approach to studying transitions in international relations and order in Southeast Asia. USC houses a diverse number of academics working on various related fields and subfields, including international relations, East Asian languages, cultures and religions, East Asian history, and more. Notable institutions such the East Asian Studies Center, the USC-Huntington Early Modern Studies Institute, the Center for International Studies, and the USC US-China Institute provide valuable resources and opportunities for collaboration. I particularly look forward to learning from esteemed scholars like Prof. David Kang, whose work on historical East Asian security and order has deeply inspired my dissertation research.

Third, I intend to leverage the platforms and networks available at POIR and USC to make progress in my dissertation research. Currently, I have produced my first empirical chapter that examines Southeast Asian security behaviour from 1800 to 1855, a transitional phase that witnessed the fraying of older cultural political orders in Southeast Asia. Between now and the academic exchange at USC, I aim to produce two more empirical chapters: one exploring multiple alignments during the transition to European colonialism and imperialism (1855-1910), and another focusing on the emergence of nationalist movements in Southeast Asia (1910-1949). During my time at USC, I plan to work on my fourth empirical chapter, which investigates the fluidity of Cold War alliances and non-alignments in Southeast Asia (c. 1949-1978). If time permits, I will also refine the three earlier chapters by seeking input from relevant historians and international relations scholars who specialise in early modern Southeast Asia, colonial Southeast Asia, and Southeast Asian nationalism.

I will work on the fourth empirical chapter and refine the three earlier chapters by, first, utilising the resources (e.g., the graduate workshops, manuscript reviews and talk series) at POIR and its affiliated centres. These platforms will allow me to present my work, exchange ideas, and connect with fellow scholars who share similar research interests. Second, I will utilise USC as a platform to engage with affiliated universities and institutions, including the International Studies Association (ISA)’s 65th Annual Convention in San Francisco in 3-6 April 2024 and the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) 2024 Annual Conference in Seattle on 14-17 March 2024.

At present, I have received an invitation to participate in an ISA panel organised by Na Young Lee, a PhD Candidate at USC. This panel will explore new frontiers in historical East Asian international relations. I will incorporate elements from the first empirical chapter to reassess the nature of China-Southeast Asia relations and order during the early modern period. Regarding the AAS conference, I plan to present preliminary findings on how memory and identity shaped Southeast Asian nationalists’ strategic imagination of a fluid and diverse hierarchical order in post-colonial Southeast Asia (1910-1949).

To prepare for my three-month exchange at USC, I will take advantage of the ANU Graduate Research and Development Network on Asian Security (GRADNAS) Pre-doctoral Exchange Program. This program has proven to be immensely helpful for facilitating exchanges between PhD students from ANU and USC. Notably, it has enabled exchanges for Iain Henry from ANU to USC, as well as Ronan Fu, Xinru Ma, and Na Young Lee from USC to ANU, during the academic years of 2017/18 and 2022/23. To facilitate my own exchange, I plan to obtain the support of my supervisor, Prof. Evelyn Goh, and Prof. David Kang, who may kindly host me at USC. Both Prof. Goh and Prof. Kang are part of the GRADNAS Senior Scholars Network, making the exchange program a feasible option for my research goals.

Overall, I am confident that an exchange at USC will provide invaluable support and resources for my dissertation research, while also contributing to my professional development as a researcher in the subfield of Southeast Asian international relations and history.