"Negotiating Norms in the African Union and ASEAN: Cases from the Charter Drafting Periods"

Moderator: Dr Elaine Tan
Thursday, 22nd Mar 2018
2.00pm to 3.30pm
PS Staff Meeting Room, AS1, #04-01
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ABSTRACT
What explains the acceptance or rejection of norms challenging sovereignty in regional organisations? This paper examines the practice of normative contestation in the African Union (AU) and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Dissatisfied with existing accounts of normative change, the paper suggests a new practice-oriented approach involving competing ‘norm circles,’ i.e., actors committed to endorsing or enforcing a norm, whose perceived utility of a norm determines their stance. The model suggests that under conditions of contestation involving at least two norm circles, actors compete according to the terms, namely the rules and practices, of their domain, the regional organization. The differences involve actors’ competencies in controlling the initiative, their mastery of other shared norms, and their ability to seek other opportunities of influence, termed ‘metis.’

Empirically, the paper examines case studies from the AU and ASEAN, in which significant new norms testing member states’ sovereignty were proposed, after which the norms were either accepted, rejected, or qualified, according to the nature of the contest. Each case study reviews the historical origins of the norm and the proposal, followed by analysing how each norm circle used the above-mentioned factors to seek approval for their proposals. It then assesses the relative importance of the factors, alternative explanations, and future implications for the norms in each case.

BIO
Joel Ng is a DPhil candidate in International Relations at St Antony’s College, University of Oxford. He is also an Associate Research Fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Relations, Nanyang Technological University. His research covers regionalism, norms, and integration in the Global South, where he studies ASEAN and the African Union in particular. He is also an adjunct researcher at the Centre for African Studies of the Nanyang Business School. He has previously worked in the non-profit and private sectors, working on refugee issues and investor relations respectively. Joel Ng holds a MA (Distinction) in International Relations from the University of Sussex, and a BA (Hons) in Development Studies from the University of East Anglia.