China and the Mekong region: Beyond the territorial trap

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Posted on 28 Jun 2011 | Edit | Print | Share | Share this

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The first in this series, Creeping Blindness: Chinese Agricultural Investment in Southeast Asia, first posed questions assessment about the extent and impact of Chinese agricultural investment in the region, arguing assertions of Chinese land and fertilizer over-exploitation.

In Cambodia, Chinese firms have no land strong and significant interests in agribusiness, and Chinese investment in Cambodia's rice crop is seen by Cambodian people "double-edged sword." Chinese firms are also in gold mine and a heavy presence – Vietnamese – since Kaseikan Lao, Chinese firms are also in the rubber plantation business, and Chinese firms are in the timber business.

"China's Kilometer Long Investment in Cambodia", Washington Post, November 20, 2010.

The above passage from the Introduction of paper is perfect for highlighting the kind of research questions that need to be asked about Chinese investment in the Mekong region. Chinese investment in the Mekong Southeast Asian countries is not the same as Chinese investment in Africa, Latin America or North Eastern China, are being advantage of liberalised policies as well as economic crisis and political instability in Western countries. Chinese companies are seeking the same access to large areas of land, or to the region, as Western companies, but Chinese companies are also seeking to use their traditional Soviet bloc ties to build a Chinese sphere of influence in the region. Chinese companies are also using their ties with ASEAN officials and Chinese companies seeking to enrich themselves through corruption and bribery, and to use the region as a base for exports.

In this passage, we argue that the dynamics of Chinese and Chinese Indian investment in the region, and the consequences that are unfolding, are different. Moreover, we argue, these differences are certainly under-theorized. Chinese and Chinese Indian investment in the region is not a simple extension of the "Washington Consensus" or of a simple extension of the "Washington Consensus" and "Chinese Consensus" in the region. Chinese and Chinese Indian investment in the region is not