

RCAS Report

Comments on Chinese President Xi Jinping's Southeast Asian Tour in April 2025

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About RCAS

香港亞洲研究中心| The Hong Kong Research Center for Asian Studies (RCAS) is a nonprofit research organization focusing on Asian affairs. It is a newly established institution founded in February 2022 by Dr. Nian Peng in Haikou and subsequently moved to Hong Kong in September 2023. We currently have an international research team with nearly 100 resident/nonresident researchers from China and other countries.

RCAS aims to become a leading research institute and think tank on Asian affairs in the Indo-Pacific region. To date, RCAS has conducted research programs on maritime disputes in the South China Sea (SCS), China's relations with the Indo-Pacific states, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), terrorism/counterterrorism in the Afg-Pak region, and so on. It is committed to promoting maritime cooperation, regional integration, and regional peace in the Indo-Pacific region at large.

RCAS has published nearly ten books in Chinese and English and more than 20 papers in SSCI/SCOPUS/CSSCI-indexed journals. Recent English publications include *Populism, Nationalism and South China Sea Dispute: Chinese and Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2022); *Pakistan's Foreign Policy: Contemporary Developments and Dynamics* (London: Routledge, 2022); *Crossing the Himalayas: Buddhist Ties, Regional Integration and Great-Power Rivalry* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *The Reshaping of China-Southeast Asia Relations in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *Territorial Disputes, The Role of Leaders and The Impact of Quad: A Triangular Explanation of China-India Border Escalations* (2023); *Managing the South China Sea Dispute: Multilateral and Bilateral Approaches* (2022); *China-Pakistan Cooperation on Afghanistan: Assessing Key Interests and Implementing Strategies* (2022); *Hedging Against the Dragon: Myanmar's Tangled Relations with China since 1988* (2021); and *China-Pakistan Conventional Arms Trade: An Appraisal of Supplier's and Recipient's Motives* (2020).

RCAS has also published hundreds of articles, and its researchers have been interviewed in various local and international media outlets, such as *The Diplomat* in the United States, *East Asian Forum (EAF)* in Australia, *Bangkok Post* in Thailand, *Jakarta Post* in Indonesia, *Lian He Zao Bao*, *Think China* in Singapore, *South China Morning Post (SCMP)*, *China-US Focus* in Hong Kong, *CGTN*, *Global Times*, *World Affairs* in China. RCAS researchers have actively participated in international conferences or study visits in the United States, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar, Cambodia, and other places.

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The contemporary 'shock' by Trump administration's tariff policy would somehow create an isolated situation in which countries might looking, beside bilateral trade negotiation with US, for alternative options for international trade. Those alternative trade activities would embrace two main elements as international liquidity currency and attractive market. Renminbi and China market would be an option.

For this context, the visit to countries like Vietnam, Malaysia, Cambodia in the coming time might be understood as the beginning of a journey for force-gathering of China. Vietnam and China share similarities in Culture, Politics, History and being the most neighbors each other would place Vietnam as an important position in implementation of China Foreign Policy.

Moreover, China as an important partner embracing 3 main pillars of Vietnam foreign policy as Power, Neighbor, and Party Diplomacy, would be more active showing the goodwill for healthy development the relationship of the two countries base on mutual respect and benefit.

Enhancing bilateral trade connections bywhich maximizing the comparative advantages of both. The benefits would share for the two countries as adding more options in international trade for both. The current incident would impact on FDI as foundation for technology transfer from the US and boosting the development of Vietnam. The withdraw of US manufacturing FDI could creat a gap for technology needs in the country. The investment into the sector might be advantage of China and promote the relations.-**Nguyen Tuan Khanh, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University of Hochiminh City, Vietnam.**

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The visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Malaysia in April 2025 occurs at a critical juncture, marked by escalating global trade tensions and growing tariff concerns. Both sides would like to enhance collaboration in strategic and emerging sectors such as high-level manufacturing, digital economy, robotics, green development, artificial intelligence, and clean energy; strengthen the long-term sustainability of Malaysia-China relations, beyond trade and investment, particularly through talent development and innovation partnerships; reinforce ASEAN-China cooperation, particularly through the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) during Malaysia's 2025 ASEAN Chairmanship.

From Malaysia's perspective, it is important for China to take more proactive actions in the following areas to develop a sustainable and win-win cooperation with Malaysia.

Firstly, promoting shared economic benefits by enhancing the competitiveness of Malaysia's domestic market. Chinese investments and enterprises should aim to complement the local market, ensuring that Malaysian businesses, especially SMEs, can develop alongside Chinese partners.

Secondly, strengthening collaboration in technological innovation to ensure that the benefits of innovation are equitably shared among all partner countries. This includes actively supporting meaningful technology transfer and capacity-building, minimising long-term technological dependency.

Thirdly, deepening supply chain integration by aligning Chinese investments more closely with Malaysia's local industrial ecosystem. Efforts should focus on supporting the upgrading and modernisation of domestic industries.-**Cheng Mingyu, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman(UTAR), Malaysia.**

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Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit in April 2025 is a pivotal moment to advance and enhance the 'ironclad friendship' between Cambodia and China. China can elevate the 'ironclad friendship' by deepening investments and injecting tangible projects that operationalize the 'Diamond Hexagon Cooperation' framework-political, economic, security, cultural, multilateral, and capacity-building ties-across the three corridors: the 'Industrial Development Corridor,' the 'Fish and Rice Corridor,' and the BRI connectivity corridor.

The 'Industrial Development Corridor' needs more expanded Special Economic Zones (SEZs) like Sihanoukville's, which created hundred thousands jobs, with new factories in electronics or green tech to diversify our \$51.15 billion GDP economy, supporting Cambodia's vision of upper-middle-income status by 2030 and high-income by 2050. The 'Fish and Rice Corridor' demands agro-processing hubs-milling rice or packaging fruits-linked to the 2025 Fangchenggang-Koh Kong cold chain route, boosting our \$14.4 billion trade in 2024. The broader BRI corridor could see billions-dollar Build-Operate-Transfer (BoT) high-speed rail network from Phnom Penh to Sihanoukville, Phnom Penh to Siem Reap, and Siem Reap to Vientiane and Bangkok, cutting travel time and smoothing regional trade and economic activities from Kunming to Phnom Penh.

China should invest heavily in capacity building, particularly education, to empower our youth-60% of our population- as architects of this partnership. I would like to emphasize that 'Education builds futures that outlast fleeting politics.' Funding the planned China Studies Center at RUPP and expanding scholarships (from 151 (2024) to 1,000 annually since Xi's 2016 visit, with a threefold increase proposed) would train Cambodians in trade, technology, and governance, strengthening the capacity-building pillar.

Tangible environmental investments are vital for grassroots trust. Injecting \$200 million into solar or wind projects along the BRI corridor, rather than solely hydropower, aligns with the 2024-2028 Action Plan's green focus, offsetting Mekong impacts and supporting the 'Fish and Rice Corridor'.

China should deepen cultural and people-to-people ties-the cultural pillar of the Diamond Hexagon-through tangible initiatives. Building on 2024's People-to-People Exchange Year and 2025's Year of Tourism, a \$50 million fund for more Khmer-Chinese language courses, heritage exchanges, and tourism infrastructure in Siem Reap could push Chinese arrivals past 3 million annually.-**Chandarith Neak, Royal University of Phnom Penh, Cambodia.**

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For Cambodia, the visit is primarily seen as an opportunity to deepen economic collaboration with China. The focus is on two flagship initiatives: the “industrial development corridor” and the “fish and rice corridor,” which align closely with Cambodia’s national development vision, the Pentagonal Strategy.

Furthermore, the Cambodian government is hoping to secure more direct investment from China, not only in agriculture and infrastructure but also in manufacturing, tourism, and digital technology.

For Cambodia, expanding the BRI beyond traditional infrastructure projects like ports to sectors such as agriculture, technology, and renewable energy could offer a more diversified economic pathway.

These sectors align with Cambodia’s long-term development goals of modernization and sustainability, reducing the country’s reliance on a few sectors like construction and infrastructure. For example, Chinese investments in agricultural modernization and clean energy would not only support Cambodia’s rural economy but also help the country transition toward a greener, more sustainable future, addressing growing environmental concerns.

Moreover, with the dismantled of USAID programs, increasing Chinese investments in social sectors could fill a critical gap in Cambodia’s development. By shifting focus to social welfare alongside infrastructure, China could demonstrate a more comprehensive and responsible approach to Cambodia's development needs, thereby improving its image and making its investments more palatable to the Cambodian public.

China’s increased support to countries in SEA amid U.S. tariff pressures positions it as a “helping friends in need,” reinforcing its long-term goal of expanding influence in SEA, and this gesture is especially strategic as China vows to “fight to the end” against U.S. trade measures, using economic cooperation to counterbalance the U.S.-**Po Sovinda, Royal University of Phnom Penh, Cambodia.**

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