

MALAYSIA AND INDONESIA'S RESPONSES
TO CHINA'S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE (BRI):
THE PORT DIMENSIONS

LOW YEH CHER

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF SOCIAL SCIENCES


FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES
UNIVERSITI KEBANGSAAN MALAYSIA
BANGI

2018

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work in this thesis is my own except for quotations and summaries, which have been duly acknowledged.

29 OGOS 2018



LOW YEH CHER
P92936

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Kuik Cheng Chwee for his patience, guidance, support and advice throughout this journey. Under his supervision, I have completed this study with a light heart as he is always supportive and resourceful for his supervisees. His wisdom kindles the torches along my pathway to knowledge. I would like to take the chance to thank Dr. Hoo Chiew Ping, who is the reviewer of my proposal during the colloquium and the internal examiner for my viva. Thank you for your constructive suggestions and advices.

Also, I would like to extend my gratitude to lecturers who involved in teaching and being the guiding lights in my research. Apart from that, my warmest thank you to all my fellow classmates. Your support and suggestions with a keen sense of humour made this journey bearable and memorable. I would like to mention my research buddy Syed and class representative Khairol as they have given me support to complete this research. This research was held in National University of Malaysia and Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Affairs in Malaysia.

Most importantly, to my dearest parents, Dr. Low Kim Wah and Mdm. Liew Choon Mei, for their unconditional love and support. Without whose financial and moral contribution, my research would not come into existence.

They enlightened me to pursue what I am passionate about and always encouraged me to stay inquisitive and humble. Their love is my strength. My heartfelt thanks to my parents.

Last but not least, to my younger brother - Boa Wei, to freinds, especially Jun Fang and Joyce, to individuals who have showed their ways of caring and help throughout this year, I am so fortunate to have you all by my sides, I owed a debt of gratitude to you all.

ABSTRACT

This study seeks to explain the variation of Malaysia and Indonesia's responses to China's Belt and Road Initiative with a specific focus on port projects. Malaysia's responses are perceived as positive and proactive while Indonesia's responses are considered limited and passive. This puzzling variation between Malaysia and Indonesia is illuminated by a combination of systemic pressures and domestic leaderships' political calculation. Given by the similar capacity for infrastructure development, economic need for port development, and geopolitical context in Malaysia and Indonesia, the current progress indicates that domestic factors such as public sentiments, political system, leaderships' perception and policies have greatly shaped the responses and the outcomes of the proposed port projects. The methodology adopted in this study involved process tracing and structured and focused comparison to make systematic comparison of the port projects that involved Malaysia and Indonesia with China. This study analysed information obtained from official statements, media reports and academic research meanwhile interviews are conducted with officials and experts to gain insights into the issues. The findings have indicated that under the similar systemic pressures, the political calculation of domestic leaderships have played a more significant role to determine the responses of Malaysia and Indonesia, as the leaders see a combination of risks and benefits to respond to China's port investments for their performance legitimacy. The analysis of this study can be understood as part of the dynamic in Southeast Asia's geopolitics to demonstrate weaker states' behaviour in response to greater power's initiatives. This study will suggest further feasibility study to be done by the government before executing port development as the port connectivity and competition in the region are suggested to be taken into account to avoid overcapacity or to face financing obstacles during the implementation.

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