

Superpower rivalry and the future of the Mekong



Speaker: Dr Anoulak Kittikhoun
Chief Executive Officer, MRC Secretariat

Date: 15 Sep 2023 (Friday)

Time: 15:00 – 16:30 (HKT)

Venue: AAB1312, HKBU

Zoom Link: <https://hkbu.zoom.us/j/98520924971>

Abstract

The Mekong is one of the world's greatest rivers. It drives development and supports the livelihoods of more than 70 million people – directly and indirectly – from its source in China and then as it snakes its way through Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam to the sea. Over the last decade, the Mekong – Southeast Asia's largest river – has experienced rapid development while fighting climate change that is affecting us all who live in the region. Its enduring role as a source of life and livelihoods has also come under increasing threats. In recent years, for some, the Mekong region has become a competition or even a battlefield among superpowers. Many even compare it with the South China Sea.

The lecture will explore past, present, and future developments in the Mekong region, including transboundary water development and management, from the perspectives of political geography and geopolitics, especially in the midst of the US–China relations.

Biography

Dr Anoulak Kittikhoun is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Mekong River Commission (MRC) Secretariat. He was unanimously selected by the MRC Joint Committee and appointed to the office on 17 January 2022 by the MRC Council of Ministers, representing the governments of the four MRC Member Countries of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam. He is the 3rd Riparian CEO, the 8th CEO overall, and the first from Lao PDR. Prior to his appointment as the CEO, Dr Anoulak led the MRC Secretariat's Office of CEO as Chief Strategy and Partnership Officer from 2016. He was in charge of the MRC's work on strategic planning, international cooperation and partnership, communication and stakeholder engagement, monitoring and evaluation, and organizational development. He served as Team Leader of the MRC's Basin Development Plan Programme from 2012-2016.

Dr Anoulak is the co-author of two books: *River Basin Organizations in Water Diplomacy*, and *Small Countries, Big Diplomacy*, and has published peer-reviewed book chapters and articles in leading journals such as *Theory and Society*, *International Studies Review* and *Journal of Hydrology*. His article on the Lao revolution and geography won the Reinhard Bendix award from the American Sociological Association.