

THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG  
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SEMINAR

CO-ORGANISED WITH MSSC IN GLOBAL POLITICAL ECONOMY PROGRAMME



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**Clean Air at What Cost?  
The Rise of Blunt Force Regulation**

**ABSTRACT**

In the past decade, China has increasingly resorted to top-down, “blunt force” solutions to environmental problems; officials forcibly shutter or destroy factories to reduce pollution, at immense cost to local growth and employment. Why would a high capacity state like China resort to such a costly method of pollution control? I argue that blunt force enforcement is targeted at overcoming principal-agent problems in the bureaucracy. When institutions are too weak to hold bureaucrats accountable, political leaders increase oversight by drastically reducing the number of steps and resources required to produce a regulatory outcome—resulting in blunt force measures. I illustrate this logic through case studies from China’s multi-year war on pollution. Using original data on blunt force measures, I then show how localities with lower bureaucratic compliance face greater blunt force pollution enforcement. These findings reveal that when bureaucratic accountability is weak, states pay a very high cost for cleaner air.

**LANGUAGE**

English

**DATE**

12 Nov 2020 (Thu)

**TIME**

4:30 – 6:00 pm (GMT+8)

**ZOOM MEETING**

ID: 973 6037 5790

<https://cuhk.zoom.us/j/97360375790>

(no password required)

**ABOUT THE SPEAKER**

Denise van der Kamp is an Assistant Professor at City University of Hong Kong. Her research explores issues in developmental politics and environmental governance, with a focus on China. In particular, she examines strategies for implementing environmental policies in contexts where both rule of law and civil society are weak. Her work has been published in journals such as *World Development*, *Governance*, and *Comparative Politics*. She received her Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of California, Berkeley in 2017, and was previously a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Pennsylvania’s Center for the Study of Contemporary China.

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