

## *China-ASEAN Nontraditional Maritime Security Cooperation*

YingHui Lee and Jane Chan

### *Abstract*

This article explores the link between soft power and nontraditional security (NTS) within the context of China-ASEAN maritime security cooperation, arguing that one should be neither overly optimistic nor dismissive with regard to the ability of NTS cooperation in the maritime domain to improve Chinese soft power capital within South-east Asia. NTS cooperation helps advance Chinese soft power primarily through enhancing Chinese image as a positive contributor to regional maritime commons. In addition, willingness of China to cooperate with ASEAN on maritime NTS issues through structured framework of ASEAN-led institutions and forums helps demonstrate China's acceptance and willingness to act in accordance with diplomatic norms and principles. To a limited extent, the Chinese focus on NTS maritime security cooperation with ASEAN has also allowed China to gain a foothold regarding regional agenda setting—especially in terms of entrenching the “dual-track” approach to undertake practical cooperation on NTS issues pending a comprehensive settlement of disputes in the South China Sea. However, Beijing's parallel development of hard power resources and the complex interactions between NTS and traditional maritime security issues continue to fuel distrust and suspicion of ASEAN member states toward China.

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**YingHui Lee** is Associate Research Fellow with the Maritime Security Programme at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University. Correspondence should be sent to isyhlee@ntu.edu.sg.

**Jane Chan** is Senior Fellow and Coordinator of the Maritime Security Programme at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University.