



MENU

[Smart Search](#) > [Results for Can small states...](#) >

Can Small States Overturn the Negotiating Table? A Case Study of Malaysia'...

[Full text at publisher](#)[Full Text Links ▾](#)[Export ▾](#)[Add To Marked List](#)

< 1 of 8 >

Can Small States Overturn the Negotiating Table? A Case Study of Malaysia's Agency Vis-À-Vis China in the ECRL Project

By [Lee, PM](#) (Lee, Pei May) ^[1] ; [Lee, CY](#) (Lee, Chun-yi) ^[2] ; [Lau, ZW](#) (Lau Zhe Wei) ^[1]
[Are you this author?](#)

[View Web of Science ResearcherID and ORCID](#) (provided by Clarivate)

Source [ASIAN POLITICS & POLICY](#)

← [View Journal Impact](#)

Volume: 18 Issue: 2
DOI: 10.1111/aspp.70075

Article Number e70075

Published APR 2026

Indexed 2026-05-03

Document Type Review

Abstract Conventional wisdom argues that more powerful states inevitably dictate the foreign policy of small states, but there is a growing body of evidence that suggests otherwise. This paper argues that small states, like Malaysia, can still exercise agency when interacting with bigger states. Using the renegotiation of the East Coast Railway Link (ECRL) as a case study, this paper examines how Malaysia exercises its agency and elucidates several factors that increased Malaysia's bargaining power. First, Malaysia holds intrinsic value for China. Second, the ECRL's status as a key project in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) lends it wider geopolitical significance. Third, the purpose of the ECRL as an alternative trade route creates a significant ongoing economic imperative for China to see the project concluded successfully. Furthermore, Malaysia's ability to cultivate positive relationships with other major powers through the adept political leadership of Mahathir increases the country's leverage.

Keywords **Keywords Plus:** [FOREIGN-POLICY](#); [ASYMMETRY](#); [POWER](#); [BELT](#)

Author Corresponding Address: Lee, Pei May (corresponding author)

Information

▼ Int Islamic Univ Malaysia, Dept Polit Sci & Madani Studies, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Corresponding Address: Lee, Chun-yi (corresponding author)

▼ Univ Nottingham, Sch Polit & Int Relat, Nottingham, England

E-mail Addresses :

peimay@iium.edu.my; Chun-Yi.Lee@nottingham.ac.uk

Addresses :

▼ ¹ Int Islamic Univ Malaysia, Dept Polit Sci & Madani Studies, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

▼ ² Univ Nottingham, Sch Polit & Int Relat, Nottingham, England

E-mail Addresses :

peimay@iium.edu.my; Chun-Yi.Lee@nottingham.ac.uk

Categories/

Classification

Research Areas: Government & Law

Citation [6 Social](#) , [6.27 Political](#) , [6.27.50 International](#)
Topics: [Sciences](#) , [Science](#) , [Relations](#)

Sustainable Development Goals:

16 Peace and Justice Strong Institutions

Web of Science Categories

Political Science

+ See more data fields

Journal information

ASIAN POLITICS & POLICY

0.9

Journal Impact Factor™ (2025)

← View Journal Impact

ISSN

1943-0779

eISSN

1943-0787

Current Publisher

WILEY, 111 RIVER ST, HOBOKEN 07030-5774, NJ

Research Areas

Government & Law

Web of Science Categories

Political Science

0.64

Journal Citation Indicator™ (2025)

Citation Network

In Web of Science Core Collection

0 Citations

Create citation alert

Use in Web of Science

0

Last 180 Days

0

Since 2013

Learn more →

Cited References

→ [View Related Records](#)

How does this document's citation performance compare to peers?

← [Open comparison metrics panel](#)

Data is from InCites Benchmarking & Analytics

This record is from:

Web of Science Core Collection

- Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI)

Suggest a correction

If you would like to improve the quality of the data in this record, please [Suggest a correction](#)

56 Cited References

[View as set of results](#)

Showing 30 of 56

(from Web of Science Core Collection)



© 2026 Clarivate. All rights reserved.

- Legal

Center

Privacy

Statement

Copyright

Notice
- Training

Portal

Product

Support

Newsletter
- Cookie

Policy

Manage

cookie

preferences

Data

Correction
- Accessibility

Help

Terms of

Use

Follow Us

