

Contested notions of 'Chineseness' in Cold War Southeast Asia

How did the complex interaction between late colonial politics and shifting Cold War allegiances and alliances shape what it meant to be 'Chinese' in societies such as Malaya and Singapore in the 1950s and 1960s? Were new notions of 'Chineseness' which emerged in this critical period organic expressions of local identity, or a reflection of geopolitical struggles over cultural expression? And how can a more regional approach to the study of Chinese-medium cultural production in Southeast Asia move the current state of the field of Chinese Diaspora studies (dominated hitherto by studies of 'the Chinese' in specific societies) into exciting new directions?

These questions have been addressed over the last 2 years by Dr Jeremy Taylor and Dr Xu Lanjun as PI and CI respectively on a British Academy IPM Grant (PM140245) entitled 'Cultures of the Chinese Cold War in British Southeast Asia'. This panel will provide an opportunity for Drs Taylor and Xu to present their findings to a wider audience. Taylor will be presenting on the role of the colonial state in Singapore and Malaya in shaping notions of 'Malayanisation' in the sphere of Chinese cultural production (in direct response to the perceived threat of cultural influence from the People's Republic of China); Xu will examine the politics of Chinese cinema in the region, discussing the circulation and distribution of Chinese films made in Hong Kong and China by pro-PRC businesspeople in Singapore, Malaya and Indonesia.

The two organisers also seek to involve other scholars (at various career stages) who are working on similar themes, so as to generate a wider dialogue on notions of 'Chineseness' which emerged in Southeast Asia in this same period.

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