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Malaysia/Singapore/Brunei Studies Group
Association for Asian Studies

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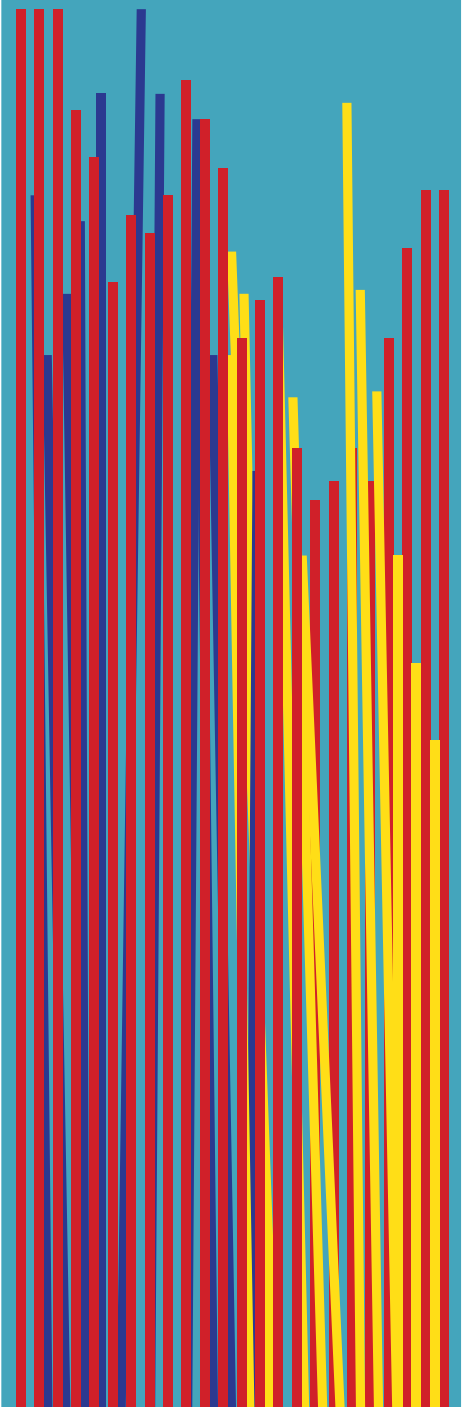

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Letter from the Chair

The 2023 Annual Meeting of the Association of Asian Studies is around the corner and this year we have a healthy crop of panels, roundtables and papers with Malaysia, Singapore, or Brunei content. There will be two meetings this year: the in-person meeting on March 16-19 in Boston, and the virtual meeting on February 17-18.

Over these two delivery formats, there will be five panels and 41 papers devoted mainly to MSB content, with an additional seven panels, 11 papers and two roundtables with significant focus on Malaysia, Singapore, or Brunei. As in past years, these papers cover a wide disciplinary range reflecting the healthy scholarship of MSB topics.
This issue of *Berita* carries these panel and paper details, including abstracts, date and times as well as room numbers (for the in-person meeting in Boston). This is a handy guide for attendees.

We will also hold the annual business meeting of the Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei (MSB) Studies Group on **Saturday, March 18, from 12:15 – 1:45 pm at Meeting Room 103 (Plaza Level) of the Hynes Convention Center**. All are welcome. The MSB Studies Group executive committee will present a report on our activities for the year and announce the winners of the inaugural Lockard Prize and the ongoing Lent Prize. We also hope to continue in our annual tradition of brainstorming with members on ways to promote the study of these countries in North America and beyond for the coming year.

Another tradition we hope to continue is the dinner with like-minded MSB scholars. Please save the date for **Saturday, March 18, at around 7:45 or 8 pm**. Look out for details on the restaurant.

This issue of *Berita* explores some of the less travelled byways of scholarship of the region. Kuansong Victor Zhuang's reflection on shepherding and editing the first disability studies collection spotlights some of the familiar challenges in such an undertaking but also other considerations unique to an emerging field of study that has previously not been in the spotlight.

Also moving out of the shadows, but for different reasons, are the voices of those who experienced the traumatic May 13, 1969 Malaysian riots. Sharifah Munirah Alatas looks at a collection of oral histories of that incident and laments the silencing of these voices through political and societal pressures accumulated over time. She welcomes the work of a younger scholars willing to break through the fear of revisiting May 13 in compiling and publishing these stories.

The study of the region will continue to advance with a new generation of scholars working on new fields and pushing the boundaries of the old. See you all in Boston.

Best wishes,
Cheong Soon GAN
Chair, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei (MSB) Studies Group
cheongsoon@gmail.com

MSB-Related Panels and Papers for AAS 2023

The 2023 Annual Meeting of the Association of Asian Studies is around the corner and this year we have a healthy crop of panels, roundtables and papers with Malaysia, Singapore, or Brunei content. There will be two meetings this year: the in-person meeting on March 16-19 in Boston, and the virtual meeting on February 17-18.

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Below is a list of those panels, papers, and roundtables, as of the end of 2022. Feel free to clip or print these pages as a guide in addition to the official conference program. This list is divided by delivery formats – in-person first, followed by online. We have organized them according to the dates and times they are scheduled.

In-person Meeting, Boston, March 16-19, 2023 (Thursday to Sunday)

In Boston, there will be four panels and 33 papers that have Malaysia, Singapore, or Brunei content as their primary or sole focus, with an additional five panels 10 papers and two roundtables that have significant MSB content.

The highlight of Boston is the MSB Studies Group sponsored panel, 'Disturbing Artefacts: The Politics of Preserving and Presenting Histories of Singapore and Malaysia', scheduled for Thursday, March 16, 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm.

The other three MSB-focused panels are:

- 'Culture, the Arts, and Everyday Life in Construction of Malaysian Identities, 1980s-2010s', Friday, March 17, 9:00 am - 10:30 am
- 'Policymaking in Singapore: Roots, Shifts, and Tensions', Saturday, March 18, 2:00 pm - 3:30 pm
- 'Performing a Singaporean Chineseness: The Impact of Sound and Language on Identity Formation', Saturday, March 18, 4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

Remember to check with the conference app or official program for any updates in the schedule.

THURSDAY, MARCH 16

Panel: A037 - Disturbing Artefacts: The Politics of Preserving and Presenting Histories of Singapore and Malaysia - *Sponsored by Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei (MSB) Studies Group*
Time: 7:00 PM - 8:30 PM
Location: Boston Sheraton Hotel - Riverway (5th Floor)

Panel Abstract:
History is an exercise of the imagination: how the past can be constructed, told and remembered, drawing inspiration from its traces. This panel critically examines four sets of sources, each representing a different genre of evidence, to offer new insights into the wider historical narratives of Singapore and Malaysia. These sources, however, are not recent discoveries or forgotten relics. On the contrary, they have been instrumental in strengthening dominant historical narratives that have played a part in nation and state-building efforts. This panel recovers underappreciated dimensions of power relations at play in the representation and preservation of these familiar sources. In doing so, the panel proceeds chronologically and illustrates the idea that novel perspectives on the histories of Singapore and Malaysia do not always require exhaustive dives into the archives or a peek into its still-declassified sections. Rather, by experimenting with different frames and questions on sources already in plain sight, the most basic exercise of historical imagination can still add rich textures to what we know of the past.

Paper 1:
Networks of History Textbooks and Intra-Colonial Control in Singapore, Malaysia, and Hong Kong, c. 1950s
Presenter: Allan Pang, University of Cambridge

Paper Abstract:
This paper will examine the flow of historical knowledge and the colonial response in Singapore, Malaysia, and Hong Kong during the 1950s. After the end of the Second World War, publishers resumed the circulation of textbooks among Chinese communities in Southeast Asia and Hong Kong. Entering the 1950s, these networks became more problematic to the British colonial officials. On the one hand, they worried that communist ideologies would infiltrate the texts. On the other hand, historical narratives that centred on the ideas of the Chinese nation (be it the mainland or Taiwan version) did not fit into the political need in Singapore and Malaya, especially the various postcolonial visions that prevailed among local administrators and political leaders. Colonial officials across the three places gathered and exchanged information to contain these textbook networks, while Chinese publishers based in Hong Kong after 1949 were trying to persist. Even though the publishers had to create separate text for each territory, they still inserted certain common ideas about the Chinese nation. This presentation will examine the connection and contestation of historical narratives. It will investigate how the Chinese diasporic and intra-colonial networks operated under the contexts of decolonisation, the Cold War, and emerging nationalisms. These transregional networks met and clashed with each other. Local, colonial, and Chinese voices,

meanwhile, all interacted with each other while defining the upcoming Malayan nation.

Paper 2:
The Framing of Singapore's Wartime Experiences through Oral Histories
Presenter: Rachel Eng, National Museum of Singapore

Paper Abstract:
Since the National Archives of Singapore's efforts in the 1980s, Singapore has collected a considerable number of oral history interviews regarding the country's experience of World War Two. Snippets from these interviews are used for public consumption in a variety of ways—museums, schools, documentaries—and have become integral to portrayals and understandings of the Fall of Singapore and ensuing Japanese Occupation. This paper considers the role of oral history in preserving and presenting the history of World War Two in Singapore, particularly with regard to the framing of a 'national', shared experience of the war. The discipline of oral history is a traditionally contentious field given, for example, its reliance on potentially unreliable memory, the inability to corroborate individual accounts, and biases that might be introduced by both the interviewee and interviewer. Yet oral histories also have an important role of capturing voices on the ground, especially in contexts where there are comparatively fewer artefacts and contemporary written records. How can we balance the need for these voices with both their selective use in public spaces as well as the problems inherent in them? I suggest that combining the two approaches would not only add to the dialogue between academic history and public practice but would also facilitate more robust discussions about the nature of war remembrance in Singapore.

Paper 3:
The Interruptive Space of the Istana Kampong Gelam in Singapore
Presenter: Muhammad Suhail Bin Mohamed Yazid, University of Cambridge

Paper Abstract:
What history is preserved with the conservation of the Istana Kampong Gelam, the home of the former Malay ruler of Singapore? This paper casts the historic compound as a site which both represents and upsets the normative orders in modern Singapore by contemplating its existence as a “heterotopia” or a space which both reflects and unnerves the world outside of it. The British first earmarked the compound for the ruler as compensation for his collaboration with the colonial authorities. While its palatial presence was initially meant to project the legitimacy for the colonial order, the royal residence also offered a utopian space for pre-colonial notions of Malay kingship to reign. The dismantlement of colonial rule in the post-war era later turned the space into a node for nationalist networks which both resonated with and disrupted dominant multi-racial nationalisms in Malaya. After Singapore’s independence as a republic, the compound became derelict, symbolic of the postcolonial state’s abandonment of its historical baggage, although descendants of the island’s royalty continued to reside there and live on the republic’s resources. The site’s subsequent designation as a national monument in the new millennium awkwardly consolidates the

contemporary multi-racial order by serving as a constructed exhibit for Malay heritage in a Chinese-dominated country. This paper postulates that beyond the histories presented on its museum panels, the Istana Kampong Glam has in itself embodied a disconcerting historical presence across time. The enduring space offers a window into the uneasy transformations that have taken place in modern Singapore.

Paper 4:
Disrupting the Canon: Decolonizing Natural History Drawings through Curation
Presenter: Syafiqah Jaaffar, National Museum of Singapore

Paper Abstract:
Natural history drawings, such as the William Farquhar Collection of Natural History Drawings in the National Museum of Singapore collection, were part of an imperial knowledge nexus in the 18th and 19th centuries that sought to identify, catalogue and 'master' knowledge of natural world in the colonies by making use of scientific systems and categories. These frameworks have since come to be adopted as the main mode through which knowledge of the natural world is accessed and processed. The result is a double erasure of local agents in the production of such knowledge. Firstly, that of existing indigenous modes of knowledge and understanding of nature. The raising of 'discovered' flora and fauna as "specimen" to be studied also inadvertently divorced them from their social surroundings. The second erasure is of local active agents: collectors, scribes, artists, identifiers – reduced to an amorphous background for the commissioners-collectors to whom these drawings and other materials are credited to. I suggest that museums in possession of such materials have a responsibility to ensure curatorial strategies evolve away from tying natural histories to imperial knowledge. I also propose that any attempt at a decolonizing curatorial practice requires the act of decentring, although these may take on various forms, subtle or overt. This paper looks at how the exhibition 'A Voyage of Love and Longing' aspired to do so via two main means: decentring the narrative focus of natural history drawings away from its credited owner; and re-ordering the naming conventions of specimens featured.

Roundtable: A039 - Labor of Piety in Southeast Asia
Time: 7:00 PM - 8:30 PM
Location: Boston Sheraton Hotel - Boston Common (5th Floor)

Participants:
Carla P Jones, University of Colorado Boulder (chair); Annisa R. Beta, University of Melbourne, Alicia Izharuddin, National University of Singapore and Diego Garcia Rodriguez, University of Sussex (discussants)

Roundtable Abstract:
This roundtable discussion focuses on an under-examined aspect of religious life that is, piety as labour, in particular its multifarious forms – emotional/affective, social, legal, and economic. It proposes a departure from previous frameworks of piety as performance. Saba Mahmood regards piety as an embodied performance, a series of conscious enactments that engage the body in 'specific gestures, styles,

and formal expressions' to 'realise a particular modality of being and personhood'. Based on this understanding, embodied performance is a means towards cultivating the right kind of emotional and psychological state conducive for worship. It is curious, however, that her discussion of these everyday efforts towards ethical dispositions lacks any emphasis on them as work or labour to produce certain desired individual and collective outcomes, immaterial or otherwise. From the emotion work of wifely obedience in Islam, the queer work of progressive Islamic education to the hidden labour of hijab manufacturers, we discuss several key questions: in what way is labour and personal piety productively connected? are daily practices of piety a form of work and labour? If so, what kinds of value do they accrue? What does it mean for pious labour to be queer/queered? Is there an 'economy' of piety? The roundtable discussion primarily focuses on ethnographic case studies in Southeast Asia, where regional religious transformations have for decades collided and converged with the global restructuring of labour and capital. We seek to engage with various conceptual understandings of 'labour' and 'work' from different disciplinary traditions less typical to religious studies to find new ways of grounding piety to material and immaterial resources that underpin everyday life. Our discussion on piety as labour and work proposes to shed light on the gendered, classed, and racialised division of labour necessary for accomplishing piety and to put the social back into the economy of religious life.

Paper: Developmental State Legacies and COVID Responses in Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore
Presenter: Wei-ting Yen, Franklin & Marshall College

In Panel: A017 - Building Political Institutions in Crisis: Lessons from Asia
Time: 7:00 PM - 8:30 PM
Location: HCC - Meeting Room 203 (Second Level)

Paper Abstract:
The COVID-19 pandemic has posed tremendous governance challenges to governments around the globe; yet some governments are more successful at handling the crisis than others. In Asia, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore are successful examples of COVID-19 governance. All three were very preemptive in dealing with the then still-a-lot-is-unknown yet potentially contagious virus and have kept the virus under control for the most part. At the same time, because the resource was limited, variations also existed across the three in terms of what the governments focused on in their crisis responses. The paper argues that pre-existing state-market relations account for the national response variations. Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan are commonly characterized as examples of developmental states. Despite the similarity, they vary with respect to the industrial strength, the enterprise types, and the trajectory of their developmental state models. The institutionalized, yet different, collaborative relationships become valuable resources on which each government taps and mobilizes during crisis emergencies. I process-trace the political choices these countries made in

response to COVID-19 in 2020. I rely on government official documents, news, and qualitative interviews for empirical evidence. Preliminary analysis shows that South Korea is able to invest in mass testing kits because the country benefits from the emerging biomedical industry. Taiwan continues to rely on its small- and medium-sized textile business and focuses on mask production. Singapore, on the other hand, relied on multinational enterprises for its industrial upgrading.

FRIDAY, MARCH 17

Paper: Crazy Rich Halal?: Class-Based Inter-Religious Commensality in Singapore
Presenter: Saroja Dorairajoo, Yunnan University

In Panel: B035 - Eating Religion Eating Harmony: Consumption and Commensality in Three Southeast Asian Countries
Time: 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM
Location: Boston Sheraton Hotel - Jamaica Pond (5th Floor)

Paper Abstract:
This study focuses on the gentrification of halal ("permissible" according to Islam) dining outlets in Singapore and the concomitant increase in non-Muslim diners, especially ethnic Chinese-Singaporeans, consuming food in halal-certified establishments.

In Singapore halal food is often associated with Malay food since Malay-Singaporeans are mostly Muslims. In Singapore where class and race are often linked, Chinese cuisine ranks high on the list of preferred cuisine which Malay cuisine and Indian cuisine are placed much lower in the hierarchy of food preference.
One trend we see in recent years is the halal-izing of mid-range fine dining restaurants. Many of these are Muslim-owned and provision of halal food for the Muslim community may be seen as the reason for this. However, one sees an increasing number of non-Muslim, especially Chinese, diners at these new halal fine-dining restaurants. While affordability could be promoted as the reason for this increase (since the Chinese are amongst the wealthiest in

Singapore while the Malays are amongst the most economically depressed), it is rather strange that the Chinese, who have generally viewed Malay food as low cuisine, are willing to pay higher prices in halal established restaurants. Why this sudden change? My research investigates the reasons for this. I argue that since these restaurants cater more to the higher income earners, we see a classed over raced preference in dining in Singapore in recent years. This reflects the fact that halal is now not only viewed positively but also viewed in a new light as high cuisine.

Panel: B039 - Culture, the Arts, and Everyday Life in Construction of Malaysian Identities, 1980s-2010s
Time: 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM
Location: Boston Sheraton Hotel - Riverway (5th Floor)

Panel Abstract:
Malaysia's push towards developed status began in earnest with Mahathir Mohamad's first term as Prime Minister and continued by his successors. While these efforts focused largely on economic and infrastructural development, the state also promoted various iterations of a new Malaysian identity, starting with Mahathir's Bangsa Malaysia. This panel examines how other facets of Malaysian society – culture, the arts, and aspects of every life – fared in relation not just to economic and political development, but also to personal, group and national identity. It posits that the performance and enactment of Malaysianness on these planes are in constant dialogue with, run counter to, or ignore official discourses of idealized national identity. The papers examine how artists like Zulkifli Yusof, Tan Chin Kuan, Liew Kungyu and Wong Hoy Cheong created social commentaries in their artwork in response to state ideologies; how English-language theater practitioners negotiated the competing visions laid out by Mahathir's Wawasan 2020 and sixth Prime Minister Najib Razak's Transformasi Negara 50; and how the imagination of Malaysian culinary identity expanded through cookbooks and tourism campaigns of the period.

Paper 1:
Cultural Politics in the Visual Arts: From Melayu Baru to Reformasi Movement
Presenter: Sarena Abdullah, Universiti Sains Malaysia

Paper Abstract:
While there are ample sources that could be cited on Malaysia's fourth Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's economic and development policies, only little that could be found regarding his influence in arts and culture. Nevertheless, Malaysian artists have reacted in various ways to Mahathir's ideas, policies and event political manoeuvring. This paper will discuss several selected works that could be traced as an emerging visual forms of cultural politics, as these artworks are intertwined and linked to artists reaction to the policies, political, and ideas that led to the notion of *Melayu Baru* (New Malays), the rapid development and the more overt oppositional leaning cultural politics of reformasi in the ongoing formation and contestation of Malaysian identity.

Paper 2:
Performing and Questioning Malaysianness through Theater
Presenter: Mary Susan Philip, University of Malaya

Paper Abstract:
In what ways are the grand narratives of nation building explored and, importantly, challenged by the theatre? When Mahathir Mohamad articulated his 'Vision 2020', one of the more contested and contentious phrases he used was 'Bangsa Malaysia'. There was little clarity about what he meant – was he referring to a united Malaysian 'race'? Did he mean to refer to the idea of a nation? What did this phrase mean in relation to Bumiputra privilege? How did it factor into ideas of a Malaysian nation?

Since then, successive Prime Ministers have put forward their own slogans or ideas: Islam Hadhari, Transformasi Negara 50, SPV30, Keluarga Malaysia. While all have mentioned the notion of being united, they are plagued by a conceptual vagueness which undermines efforts at inclusive ideas of bangsa Malaysia.

I will examine significant Malaysian English-language theatrical productions from within a specific span of time (1991-2018), to see how the ideas/ideologies brought up in these grand narratives are dealt with in the plays. Is there any overlap between the ideas in these visions, and the plays? In what ways do the plays reflect and/or challenge the bangsa Malaysia narratives? The analysis will show a considerable disconnect between official rhetoric and lived practice.

Paper 3:
Eating and Being Malaysian in Action and Digestion
Presenter: Cheong Soon Gan, University of Wisconsin, Superior

Paper Abstract:
In the late 20th century, as Malaysia hurtled towards developed status with a slew of mega projects (highways, Petronas Twin Towers, Proton) to rival the frenetic bout of concrete nationalism in the first years or Merdeka that gave the nation the Parliament, National Mosque, Tugu Negara, National Museum and others, Malaysians continued to ingest three meals, or more, a day. This act of necessary biological survival, enacted and re-enacted daily, becomes one of the sites of national imagination as cookbooks, newspaper columns, food programs on satellite TV and food blogs proliferate. While the idea of a Malaysian culinary identity had been taking shape since the colonial era, the notion that Malaysians share in and identify with foods outside of their home repertoire takes off after 1957. This paper examines how this organic, undirected aspect of everyday life that is intertwined with identity and memory, came into conversation with various state-sponsored views of a Malaysian identity (including Mahathir's vision of a new Bangsa Malaysia), articulated most visibly in the rhetoric and publicity materials of tourism campaigns of that era.

Panel: C016 - Decentering China in Global Chineseness: Rethinking Ethnic Chinese Identity Beyond China in Transnational Contexts, 1842-2022
Time: 11:00 AM - 12:30 PM
Location: HCC - Meeting Room 209 (Second Level)

Panel Abstract:
In the spirit of James Millward's recent call to decolonize the historiography of China, this panel aims to decenter the Chinese mainland in scholarship on global Chineseness. Millward has suggested revisiting Paul A. Cohen's China-centered approach in *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (1984 and 2010). Similarly, in understanding ethnic Chinese identity beyond China, there is still a need to move away from mainland-centric interpretations. In fact, China-centered concepts such as "Chinese diaspora" remain prevalent despite reservations previously articulated by Wang Gungwu (the doyen of Chinese migration studies), Sinophone studies researchers, and other scholars. Ironically, Chinese migratory experiences have actually been rather diverse since emigration from China significantly increased as a result of Hong Kong becoming a British colony in 1842. Indeed, Chinese communities worldwide have included Cantonese gold rushers in California, ethnic Chinese communities in other parts of Asia beyond the Chinese mainland (such as Taiwan and Southeast Asia), and Wenzhou migrants in post-Cold War Europe. This panel thus adopts a more balanced analysis of global Chineseness by questioning, for instance, the extent to which it is possible to be ethnically Chinese (*huaren*) while decentering the mainland Chinese state (*Zhongguo*). Panelists will present papers advocating transnational approaches, with case studies including Taiwan, Southeast Asia, and the United States. These case studies will draw from interdisciplinary fields such as Asian Studies, Asian American Studies, and Asian Diaspora Studies.

Paper 1:
Were Southern Chinese "Han People"? Views of Overseas Chinese from Japanese Colonial Taiwan (1895-1945)
Presenter: Huei-Ying Kuo, Johns Hopkins University

Paper Abstract:
Why did prewar Japan's pan-Asianism fail to create a shared ethnic framework connecting overseas Chinese across different colonies in Asia? Were the ethnic majority in Japanese Taiwan (1895-1945)—officially registered as Han—part of "overseas Chinese"? This paper aims to introduce the regional factors involving Japan's southern policies from Taiwan that shaped the identities of overseas Chinese, especially those in British Malaya. I show the changes in the Japanese discourses on Southern Chinese People (Jp. Minami shina minzoku; SCP). The SCP refers to those living in South China, the Han in Taiwan, and those identifying as Chinese diasporas (Ch. Huaqiao). At first, Japan emphasized the preservation of quintessential Han Chineseness among SCP, considering the non-Han peoples' occupation of northern China after the Han dynasty. Later, in the 1930s and World War II, Japan emphasized the non-Han elements among the SCP. The Huaqiao in Malayan espoused the Chinese official nationalism that, grounded in recent

archaeological discoveries, emphasized the northern root of the orthodox Han Chinese. The northern prejudice against non-Han fueled the Huaqiao's derogatory views toward other ethnicities. In Taiwan, the Han people learned about the new Japanese term for the Taiwanese aborigines, which changed from savages to the Takasago people after 1935. The different ethnic politics in colonial Taiwan and Malaya also accounted for their divergent postcolonial nation-buildings.

Paper 2:
Being Chinese in the Penumbras of Greater and Lesser States – the Case of Malacca, 1795-Present
Presenter: Jerry Dennerline, Amherst College

Paper Abstract:
In December 2020 UNESCO listed the "religious" procession known as Wangkang in Malacca as an Intangible Cultural Heritage. Such listings require state sponsorship and are intended to help preserve and sustain cultural activities that might be endangered by modern development. In this case, the event was sponsored jointly by Malaysia and the People's Republic of China, linking it with Ongchun festivals in Southern Fujian. Politically, the listing serves to underscore the closeness of Malaysia in contemporary global context. Yet, in Malaysia the Chinese community is politically peripheral because it is non-Malay, while in China, Malacca's community is simply "overseas." Historically, the Wangkang has its own local roots and its own course of development from response to cholera epidemics to modern spectacular performance.

This paper will analyze the politicization of "Chineseness" at the state level by the British East India Company, the Colonial regime, and the post-colonial government – all visible in the bright sunlight -- and the concurrent development of performance in the local political culture in the continuously overlapping shadows. The analysis will focus on the role of women, the social integration of migrant workers of diverse backgrounds, community responses to shifting economic opportunities, and the development of education and social welfare institutions in the process.

Paper: 'This State Owed Much to the Jaffna Tamil.': Migration and Social Mobility of Tamils between Jaffna and Malaya during the 20th Century
Presenter: Kristina Hodelin, Independent Scholar

In Panel: D034 - Economic, Legal, and Social Power in 20th Century British Colonial South/Southeast Asia
Time: 2:00 PM - 3:30 PM
Location: HCC - Meeting Room 104 (Plaza Level)

Paper Abstract:
In her 2012 work, *Subaltern Lives*, Clare Anderson claims that reading the institutional borders of the archive turns our attention "towards people who have been absent from history" and "opens up new ways of thinking about Empire." It is in this way that the story of Jaffna Tamil migration during the colonial period is unique. Over the course of the late nineteenth into mid-twentieth century there was small-scale migration between two locales of the British empire: Jaffna in Ceylon and

Malaya. The Jaffnese Tamils were a white-collar migrant group of civil service workers who played a strategic role in the economic development of Malaya, as a result of educational and professional networks between Jaffna Tamils and British officials back in Ceylon. Their position of privilege and subordination within the colonial system parallels the development and extraction of resources throughout the region. By reviewing letters between British officials and prominent Jaffna Tamils, as well as, civil service records, government gazettes, and cartoons a more complex account of how the British saw Jaffna Tamils vis-à-vis other groups in the colony can be realized. These colonial relationships affected subsequent migration between the old colony of Ceylon and the new colony of Malaya and demonstrate that colonial rule was a dynamic project encompassing the agency of both colonial officials and the colonies 'inhabitants. Similar to larger colonial foundations like the postal service and railroads in Malaya, these relationships further informed colonial frameworks and South and Southeast Asian societies post-independence.

Paper: Sisters' Island Marine Park: A Framework for Multi-Stakeholder Stewardship
Presenter: Zeehan Jaafar, National University of Singapore

In Panel: D037 - Storied Ecologies: History and Heritage in Southeast Asia's National Parks
Time: 2:00 PM - 3:30 PM
Location: HCC - Meeting Room 202 (Second Level)

Paper Abstract:
The Sisters' Island Marine Park is a marine protected area within the territorial waters of Singapore gazetted in 2014. This 40ha marine park comprises two islands—Pulau Subar Laut and Pulau Subar Darat—and bound by the coasts of these islands as well as western shorelines of Pulau Tekukor and St. John's Island. The marine park is within the Straits of Singapore and is adjacent to some of the busiest shipping channels globally. The areas within, and adjacent to, this marine park is heavily used for recreation (boating, SCUBA diving, kayaking, angling, free diving, snorkelling, swimming, camping, picnicking etc.), research (marine research stations, research sites), religious activities (e.g., pilgrimages, scattering of ashes), and commercial mariculture. Since its inception, stakeholders ranging from government agency officers, to academics, and to recreational users, meet and actively collaborate to realize the four key roles of this marine park—outreach, education, research, and conservation. This paper discusses the framework for a successful multi-stakeholder initiative that guides many of the decisions for the operations at The Sisters' Island Marine Park.

Paper: Friends in Dharma: Buddhist Diplomacy in Post-Independence Singapore
Presenter: Jack Meng-Tat Chia, National University of Singapore

In Panel: E014 - Buddha's Diplomats: Buddhism and Diplomacy in Modern Asia
Time: 4:00 PM - 5:30 PM
Location: Boston Sheraton Hotel - Olmsted (5th Floor)

Paper Abstract:
Although Singapore has a Buddhist-majority population, where about a third of population considers themselves Buddhists, scholars of Southeast Asian Buddhism (and Southeast Asia more broadly) have seldom considered the maritime Southeast Asian country as a part of the Southeast Asian Buddhist world, a world dominated by the Theravāda Buddhist communities in mainland Southeast Asia. Consequently, they tend to neglect the presence of a majority Chinese Mahāyāna Buddhist population in Singapore and their connections with the broader Buddhist communities in this region. Besides, probably lesser known to many, Singapore engages in Buddhist diplomacy to enhance its foreign relations with other Asian countries. It thus comes as little surprise that previous studies on Singapore's foreign relations have overlooked the practice of Buddhist diplomacy in the country's conduct of public and cultural diplomacy. This paper hence uses Singapore's Buddhist diplomacy as a case study to understand Buddhist diplomacy in modern Asia. It first suggests that not all countries that engage in Buddhist diplomacy have a long Buddhist heritage. Despite being a young country with neither a long Buddhist heritage nor prominent sacred sites and artifacts, Singapore's small majority Buddhist population has actively engaged in Buddhist diplomacy with other Asian countries. The second is to suggest that Singapore's Buddhist diplomacy is a product of its geopolitical location. As an "accidental nation" surrounded by Muslim majority neighbors, Buddhist diplomacy allows the small state to connect culturally with Buddhist and non-Muslim leaders in the region and establish wide-ranging diplomatic ties.

Paper: Empowering Student's Identities and Fostering Racial Justice through Antiracist Pedagogy in Indonesian, Malaysian and Thai at Ohio University
Presenter: Pittaya Paladroi-Shane, Ohio University

In Panel: E037 - Reframing Southeast Asian Language Teaching: Critical Perspectives - Sponsored by the Council of Teachers of Southeast Asian Languages (COTSEAL)
Time: 4:00 PM - 5:30 PM
Location: HCC - Meeting Room 204 (Second Level)

Paper Abstract:
The use of antiracist pedagogy in conjunction with the curricular redesign for elementary Indonesian, Malaysian and Thai at Ohio University was introduced in Fall 2021. The change was timely, and responsive to the ongoing racial, social, and political struggles in American society and the curricular reform at the institution. In solidarity with the Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), the Center for International Studies, where these languages are housed, announced its "Black Lives Matter and Global Racial Justice" initiative to lead integrative and educational activities to address racism in the U.S. and around the globe. The curricular redesign was essential to keep these languages part of the "reimagined general education" initiative, which went into effect in AY 2020-2021. Any students who enroll in the elementary courses of these languages can fulfill the requirements on diversity and practice. Based on the backward design proposed by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe (2005), the new curricula invite students to learn big ideas or

concepts behind the language form. The antiracist pedagogy enables teachers to teach language through critical perspectives. It not only allows students to critically explore important issues around cultural differences and injustice related to race, gender, religion, and age, but it also naturally connects and promotes exploration of students' identities, dismantling colonialism, inclusive learning environment. As the World Language Coordinator, I will reflect on strategies for curriculum design, instructional strategies, and resources to do allyship and actions, as well as the challenges of preparing instructors for incorporating critical race theory.

Paper: What Is a *Wali*? Guardianship and Masculinity in Muslim Southeast Asia
Presenter: Eric C. Thompson, National University of Singapore

In Panel: E019 - Men and Masculinity in Contemporary Asia
Time: 4:00 PM - 5:30 PM
Location: HCC - Meeting Room 210 (Second Level)

Paper Abstract:
Based on research in Indonesia and Malaysia, this paper examines the development of concepts of Muslim masculinity as a relational gender construct. In Muslim marriage, the responsibilities of a bride's father as her wali (guardian, protector) are transferred to her husband. The Quran emphasizes non-reciprocal responsibilities of men and women, especially in marriage, as in Surah 4, Verse 34: "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because God has given the one more than the other, and because they support them by their means." Critical voices point to this, other religious verses, and Muslim discourse more generally as imposing patriarchal gender relations that subordinate women and afford men greater status and rights in Indonesian and Malaysian communities. In historical perspective, this is often cast as introducing patriarchy into Austronesian Southeast Asian societies previously marked by relatively high degrees of gender egalitarianism. Yet in contemporary Muslim discourse – from lectures by religious authorities to everyday discussions within families – as much if not more emphasis is placed on men's and especially husbands' responsibilities toward women and children. Drawing on a range of ethnographic interviews, contemporary texts, and fieldwork in rural Indonesia and Malaysia, the paper outlines the discursive contours of the *wali* concept especially in reference to the ways in which men draw on this discourse to construct models of and for masculinity.

SATURDAY, MARCH 18

Paper: *Sunnat Perampuan* and the Politics of Assimilation, Acculturation and Belongingness - An Intersectional Analysis of Female Genital Circumcision Among Tamil Muslim Women in Malaysia
Presenter: Pavithra Nandanan Menon, National University of Singapore

In Panel: F039 - Memory, Translation, and Cultural Mediation
Time: 8:30 AM - 10:00 AM
Location: Boston Sheraton Hotel - Olmsted (5th Floor)

Paper Abstract:
The Tamil Muslims in Malaysia constitutes a unique ethnic/racial minority group. They are the descendants of Tamil Muslim immigrants or the children of Tamil Muslims converts who migrated to the Malay peninsula from South India. One of the main trends among the Muslim minorities in Malaysia is the attempts to be "Malayized" or assimilated into the Malay ethnic group by adopting their religion and culture as they believe that following Malay cultural practices purifies their identity as a Muslim. Tamil Muslim Women in Malaysia have recently adopted the practice of Female Genital Cutting/Circumcision (FGC), also known as *Sunnat Perampuan*. This practice wherein a part of the clitoris is removed before the age of two has become an integral part of the Malay Muslim identity as the local cultural interpretation of Islam deems it wajib or obligatory, while many activists have pointed out there is no mention of female circumcision in the Qur'an. While FGC is unheard of among Tamil Muslim women in India and even in the older generation of Tamil Muslim women in Malaysia, it has become a common performance of purification, cultural ideals of femininity and modesty, control of sexuality, as well as part of Assimilation into Malay culture and Malay ideas of being a good Muslim. Through detailed interviews with 20 Tamil Muslim women in Malaysia, this paper will provide an ethnographic study of FGC using an intersectional lens focusing on gender race and religion to bring out the female standpoint concerning body and agency, which is often neglected.

Panel: G041 - Policymaking in Singapore: Roots, Shifts, and Tensions
Time: 2:00 PM - 3:30 PM
Location: HCC - Meeting Room 111 (Plaza Level)

Panel Abstract:
The Singapore state is widely known to be one of the most efficient, effective, and corrupt-free in the world. Researchers and practitioners from all over the world regularly study how the government develops and implements public policies that are widely perceived to be the tremendously successful. More recently, however, generational social and political changes are creating new challenges and contradictions for the state and its existing public policies. The long dominant People's Action Party is in a midst of a leadership transition from the current Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong to Minister Lawrence Wong. More young Singaporeans are also challenging existing notions of social welfare, race-relations, and the existing government-citizen social compact. This timely panel with examines the policymaking in

contemporary Singapore by critically investigating its numerous roots, tracking its shifts over time, and analyzing its contemporary tensions. This panel presents four papers from four scholars of diverse ranks, disciplines, demographics, and institutions. Nathan's paper on elderly access to social welfare examines how Singaporean social welfare policy has evolved over time. Laavanya's paper interrogates the state's existing policies managing inter-ethnic race relations, describing and explaining how it is crumbling in the face of domestic and international trends. Walid's paper on examines how tensions between institutions and personalities in Singapore's political leadership transition could result in different policymaking outcomes in the socio-economic and political realms. Elvin's paper closes the panel by presenting a new overarching conceptual, analytical, and theoretical framework to help understand and explain contemporary policymaking in Singapore.

Paper 1:
Lingering Detachments: Understanding Self-Denial of Social Assistance Among Older Singaporeans
Presenter: Nathan Peng, University of British Columbia

Paper Abstract:
Prevalent theories on citizens' attitudes towards social welfare predominantly assume self-interest as the central motivating factor. In these formulations, differences in expressed public opinion on social transfers and who deserves them are primarily explained by individualistic calculations of cost and benefit. Few, if any, have examined self-denial of social assistance – when those who meet policy criteria for financial aid choose not to apply - and what contributes to such behaviour. The proposed paper leverages the Singapore Life Panel (SLP), that collects comprehensive data across diverse measures of wellbeing and circumstances for Singaporeans above fifty years old, to conduct cluster analysis that will help us understand (i) the number of potential social assistance self-deniers in Singapore, (ii) their profiles, and (iii) if this behaviour is potentially influenced by social network or neighbourhood characteristics, allowing us to move the discussion on welfare attitudes beyond individual level influences. The paper will also provide an account of the shifts in social policy thinking in Singapore over the past few decades, the inherent tensions caused by competing policy objectives, and highlight why the present Singaporean context is ideal for such an investigation. For example, Singapore's productivist orientation to welfare increases generalizability to countries with similar dispositions like the US or UK. Also, significant changes in government narratives coupled with Singapore's rapid development allows for sharper examinations of the impacts and stickiness of temporal and other contextual factors.

Paper 2:
Beyond Racialized Exceptionalism: Ethnicized Tensions in Contemporary Singapore
Presenter: Laavanya Kathiravelu, Nanyang Technological University

Paper Abstract:
Singapore has generally been regarded as one of the world's best functioning examples of a multicultural modern nation-state. Post-

independence, the small city-state with a densely packed population has largely avoided ethnic strife and violence that has characterized inter-ethnic relations in many other post-colonial countries in the last few decades. Held up against western liberal democracies such as the United States and France where sustained and widespread issues of racial violence and stratification have been widely acknowledged, the lack of overt conflict is lauded as a resounding success. The PAP government has long prided this outcome on its close management of racial and religious matters. In the past few years however, rising levels of overt discrimination and everyday racism, particularly towards ethnic minorities, as well as xenophobia directed against immigrants is questioning the efficacy of this model. A renewed focus on race relations by the government, who constantly evoke the dangers of Western identity politics has resulted. Based on analysis of speeches by heads of state (both current and incoming), as well as other ministers and, interviews with immigrants and Singaporeans, this paper demonstrates that Singapore's discourse of exceptionalism is crumbling in the face of globalized trends that question the validity and equality of the social contract that the government has put forth. Through examining effects of rising socio-economic inequality, heightened race consciousness and large-scale immigration, this research argues that Asian discourses of cultural exceptionalism and political difference are limited and ethnocentric, particularly in cases of highly interconnected and globalized spaces.

Paper 3:
Business As Usual or Change Ahead? Institutions Versus Personalities in Singapore Policymaking
Presenter: Walid Jumblatt Abdullah, Nanyang Technological University

Paper Abstract:
For the first time in Singapore's post-independence history, there had been much uncertainty about the leadership succession plans of the ruling People's Action Party (PAP). The succession timeline has been disrupted due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and in likelihood, the General Elections 2020 results. Eventually, the party settled on Lawrence Wong, a member of the so-called 4G (Fourth Generation) leadership. Wong's unassuming demeanour and non-elite background have been cited by some as causes for optimism in the trajectory of the country. However, this paper contends that viewing Singapore politics through the lens of personalities more so than institutions would result in a misreading of the situation and misplaced optimism on what could happen. It is my postulation that policymaking in Singapore is more likely to be economically and even socially more progressive under the 4G, but not politically. To comprehend this argument, we need to investigate the ideologies which the PAP considers core to its legitimacy. While concessions are more readily made on social welfare and LGBT rights, when it comes to discussions pertaining to race and religion, for instance, the state still wishes to be the final arbiter. If changes to how the PAP approaches race and religion, and how it treats its political opponents, are to happen, the main agents of change would have to be voters/citizens and

how they assert pressure on the government, and not from some imaginary reformist from within the party.

Paper 4:
Goldilocks' Purgatory: The Rhetorical Logic of Policymaking in Singapore
Presenter: Elvin Ong, National University of Singapore

Paper Abstract:
Scholars of Singapore policymaking attribute its processes and outcomes to numerous factors – the dominant People's Action Party's (PAP) legitimacy and political dominance, neoliberal capitalism, communitarianism, pragmatism, elitism, amongst others. Yet this vast literature fails to illuminate how the government rhetorically justifies and promotes the various policies to the public, and to itself. This paper argues that the Singapore government actively utilizes a rhetorical script of public policy moderation-between-two-extremes as a rhetorical strategy to convince the public, the politicians, and policymakers themselves of the logic and correctness of their own decisions. I term this rhetorical script "Goldilocks' Purgatory". This script is socially rooted the institutional setup of a civil service which analyzes public policy via an econometric model of dichotomized tradeoffs. It is politically rooted in the PAP's continued political dominance which sees no need to make drastic changes since a majority of the population votes for the party. It is also economically rooted neoliberal global capitalism that prizes regulatory conservatism for profit maximization. This script is further imbibed and reproduced by a non-investigative press that does not challenge the ideological hegemony of dichotomized extremes. Ultimately, "Goldilocks' Purgatory" creates its own unique timeless and directionless consequences. Without a clear bearing towards heaven or hell, Singaporean society is adrift as the government's public policies become unanchored from the demands and aspirations of an evolving citizenry.

Panel: G039 - Constructing National Progress: The Politics of Science, Technology, and Medicine in Contemporary Southeast Asia
Time: 2:00 PM - 3:30 PM
Location: HCC - Meeting Room 110 (Plaza Level)

Panel Abstract:
What does "progress" mean to the nation-building project in Southeast Asia? The longing for national progress has captivated, or haunted, many post-colonial Southeast Asian states as they strive to maintain economic, political, and scientific sovereignty. Drawing on interdisciplinary theories and methods of anthropology, history, sociology, and science and technology studies (STS), this panel explores the complex entanglements between science, technology, and market-making in the nation-building project of Southeast Asia. Our panelists investigate the politics and various stakes of national progress - namely, at what cost and at whose expense?

Paper 1:
Making Sense: The Politics of Perception at a Malaysian Petrochemical Frontier
Presenter: Chun-Yu (Jo Ann) Wang, Stanford University

Paper Abstract:
In 2011, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Najib Razak, and the CEO of the national oil company Petronas, Shamsul Azhar Abbas, announced the master plan for the Pengerang Integrated Petroleum Complex (PIPC): a state-led, multibillion-dollar refinery and petrochemical complex. This ambitious development project aimed to transform Pengerang, a small fishing village in Southern Johor, into the "Rotterdam Port of the East," the biggest oil and gas hub in the Asia-Pacific region. However, concerns over ecological destruction and industrial pollution loomed large. This paper examines how local perceptions of environmental and health risks associated with the PIPC evolved from its siting, preparation, construction, to operation, as well as how these volatile yet generative discursive terrains afforded different kinds of politics. Drawing on data collected through participant observation and in-depth interviews, I account for the emergence of a non-elite village leadership and an anti-petroleum complex movement through contesting environmental impact assessments conducted by corporate scientists and approved by government authorities. I then account for the gradual reconstitution of senses and subjectivities through the everyday experiences of "living with oil," both communal and personal, during the post-movement period. In contrast to commonsensical understandings of how the changing local attitudes towards the national oil development and local perceptions of environmental and health risks are indicative of rural nativity, government propaganda, corporate bribe, or political resignation, this paper foregrounds the villagers' undeniable agency and will to "make sense" of the drastic industrial change that is profoundly reworking their surroundings and lives, community and identity.

Paper 2: Developing Diabetes in Postcolonial Singapore
Presenter: Mohammad Khamsya Bin Khidzer, University of California, San Diego

Paper Abstract:
This paper examines the global history of diabetes through the postcolonial history of Singapore. More specifically, I look at the period between 1960 to 1990 to understand how diabetes came to be recognized as a disease entity in the clinical setting, but more importantly how it accrued cultural and political meaning in the public health discourse in Singapore. These combined processes contributed to the development of diabetes, the disease and diabetics as essentially a new 'people' and classificatory category, which in turn presented a tabula rasa moment ripe with historical and cultural opportunity. I use 'developing diabetes' to highlight the intense developmentalism in postcolonial Singapore that eventually made its way into public health discourse by way of the association of cold war de rigeur development discourse with chronic diseases such as diabetes. Walt Rostow's ideas on modernization and development, so fervently embraced by Singapore's technocratic elite, found a partner in Abdel Omran's epidemiologic

transition which describes the shift from tropical infectious maladies to chronic diseases for developed nations. As diabetes became unmoored from its clinical origins, key government actors keen on building legitimacy in a nation that had emerged from a fraught and violent campaign of independence in 1965, 'rehabilitated' its image into a marker of progress and modernity in the postcolonial era. Diabetics therefore embody the tension between the economic affluence delivered by a nascent government and the burden of development.

Paper: "Years behind My Straight Peers": Sexual Discipline, Homeownership, and Queer Citizenship in the State-Constructed Housing Estates of Singapore
Presenter: Xinyu Guan, Cornell University

In Panel: G037 - Resources, Social Norms, Politics, and the State
Time: 2:00 PM - 3:30 PM
Location: Boston Sheraton Hotel - Olmsted (5th Floor)

Paper Abstract:
Eighty percent of Singapore's population lives in state-constructed housing estates, where the vast majority of the inhabitants purchase their apartments from the state. My paper examines how state-constructed housing ties normative citizenship to a heteronormative institution of homeownership that disciplines sexuality and controls access to intimate space. LGBTQ people face multiple restrictions in purchasing state-constructed housing, the majority of which is only made available to people in heterosexual unions or living with their biological kin. LGBTQ people can only purchase state-constructed housing after the age of 35, and would typically live with their natal kin until this age or even beyond. Drawing on two years of fieldwork, I detail how LGBTQ people in Singapore conceptualize and create everyday spaces of intimacy in the state-constructed housing estates, either as belated homeowners older than 35, as individuals living with their natal kin, or as tenants renting from homeowners. Moving beyond a binary of state discipline versus queer resistance, I discuss how LGBTQ individuals are enfolded as participants in state-constructed housing and normative citizenship. In particular, I consider how the restrictive incorporation of LGBTQ residents in state-constructed housing widens economic disparities and power differentials among LGBTQ people in Singapore; I reflect on the stakes of this fragmentation on a critical queer politics in Singapore. Lastly, I rethink the categories of queerness and homonormativity in Singapore through the materialities and temporalities of the housing estate, and explore the relevance of these categories for an antiauthoritarian politics in Singapore and the wider region.

Paper: The Great Grab: Sand Mining and Artistic Interventions in Southeast Asia
Presenter: Stephanie Benzaquen-Gautier, University of Nottingham

In Panel: G014 - Public Art, Ecological Crisis, and Environmental Activism in East and Southeast Asia
Time: 2:00 PM - 3:30 PM
Location: Boston Sheraton Hotel - Independence West (2nd Floor)

Paper Abstract:
In 2019, the United Nations defined sand mining as one of the key sustainability challenges of the 21st century. Sand has become a hot commodity worldwide, used for the creation of artificial lands and construction materials in the context of ongoing urbanization. Of all the regions concerned by sand dredging and traffic, Southeast Asia has been paying a heavy price in terms of the activity's impact on ecosystems and people's livelihoods. The paper proposes to address this issue through the projects of three artists: *The White Sand in Exile* (2020) by Xuan Ha (Vietnam), *Shifting Sands* (2017-ongoing) by Sim Chi Yin (Singapore), and *Enjoy my Sand* (2013-2015) by Khvay Samnang (Cambodia). The three bodies of work mobilize a broad range of artistic expressions (performance, photos, objects). The paper will explore the visual and material criticalities that are produced in the process, more specifically with regard to the questions of environmental activism, perpetration, and (nonhuman) agency. It will analyze how these artists rethink the ecological and social effects of sand mining**,** reassess (historical and political) intra-regional power relations, and create new platforms of communication on the 'great grab'. Sand is now the world's most extracted resource after water, and there is therefore an urgent need for global governance on the matter. In its conclusion, the paper will open the conversation about the potential role of artistic interventions in the development of such an ecopolitics of sand mining, for example through their contributing new forms of public engagement with the issue.

Panel: H034 - Performing a Singaporean Chineseness: The Impact of Sound and Language on Identity Formation
Time: 4:00 PM - 5:30 PM
Location: HCC - Meeting Room 109 (Plaza Level)

Panel Abstract:
This panel examines the impact of sound and language on identity formation in Singapore. How does the government's language policy impact local artists in the music and theatre scenes as well as their artistic productions? What challenges do traditions as old as Nanyin and Chinese orchestra face in the changing socio-political and cultural environments amidst the regional geopolitical context? As the only independent nation-state outside of mainland China with a majority of ethnic Chinese, these have deep implications in terms of identity formation, Chineseness and otherwise. Inevitably, issues of power and politics, as well as hierarchies and privileges between majority and minority groups defined in terms of ethnicity and access to the dominant language(s) come into play. Specifically, while Ming-yen Lee suggests that multicultural musical ("non-Han") elements are absorbed into Chinese orchestra to expand its range as well as introduce greater musical diversity, Wah-Guan Lim argues that theatrical performances too experiment with the multilingual to give voice to those marginalized by state policies. By shaping its cultural policies according to political and economic goals instead of encouraging creative freedom, Yun-Qu Tan maintains that the state in fact stifles the organic growth of local musicians and local music. Loh Yi-Fong, Ng Ping-Siang and Keng-We Koh probe the question of Chineseness through the musical genre of Nanyin by tracing its transformations in

Singapore and its interactions with the wider Chinese-speaking world. In so doing, they locate Nanyin in the city-state within a greater regional confluence amidst an ever-shifting pan-Chinese identity.

Paper 1:
A Politically Sound Musician: Singapore's Manufactured Identity and Its Impact on Local Musicians
Presenter: Yun Qu Tan, Northwestern University

Paper Abstract:
This research examines the cultural policies of the People's Action Party (PAP) – Singapore's ruling political party since post-independence – in post-independent Singapore to the 2000s, primarily focusing on the effects of the Bilingual Policy (1959) and Goh Chok Tong's 1999 National Day Rally Speech where he coined the term 'Heartlander'. It analyses the concept of manufactured identity adopted by PAP that cultural identity formation need not be organic and should be shaped according to their political and economic goals. The idea of heavy state influence over Singapore's national identity has been reinforced by past research (Chia 2011; Chong 2011; Harper 1997; Koh 2005; Quah 1977; Rocha 2011; Seah 1977). While some discuss the art scene in Singapore, the impact of manufactured identity on the works and lives of Singaporean musicians have largely been neglected. This research intends to supplement this area of focus and argues that manufactured identity impedes the development of local musicians as it limits creative freedom and hinders the creation of a 'critical and discussive milieu' (Kong 2012) which is necessary for the arts to flourish in Singapore. The questions that this research aims to raise and answer are as follows: How have Singaporean musicians experienced the limitations of Singapore's cultural policies? Do they accept constraints of these policies or choose alternatives? What are the repercussions when these alternatives are chosen? In addition to the analysis of musical sources, qualitive methodology through semi-structured interviews with Singaporean musicians will also be used in this research.

Paper 2:
Chinese Orchestral Compositions with Multicultural Musical Elements: A Case Study of Wang Chenwei's "the Sisters' Islands"
Presenter: Ming-Yen Lee, Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts

Paper Abstract:
In recent years, a number of Chinese orchestras have begun to commission composers to produce Chinese orchestra music with "non-Han musical elements" in order to broaden their musical horizons and introduce more musical diversity in their concert programs. Unfortunately, many of these multicultural compositions never gained popularity due to inadequate reconciliation of differences between the chosen musical style and the Chinese orchestra medium. As a result, some were only performed once and forgotten. This paper uses Singaporean composer Wang Chenwei's "The Sisters' Islands" as a case study of a successful Chinese orchestra composition with multicultural musical elements. "The Sisters' Islands", which won the Singapore Composer Award at the 2006 Singapore International Competition for Chinese

Orchestral Composition, has been frequently performed in Singapore and the Greater China region over the last decade. I discuss how Wang Chenwei's "The Sisters' Islands" effectively grasps the characteristics and sounds of each Chinese musical instrument and incorporates Indonesian Gamelan, Malay dance, and Middle Eastern musical elements. I argue that, on the one hand, "The Sisters' Islands" presents the feasibility of fusing the Chinese orchestral medium with multicultural musical elements; on the other hand, it demonstrates the different understanding of "multiculturalism" in Greater China versus in Singapore, a Chinese majority country in Southeast Asia.

Paper 3:
Navigating Nanyin in the Nanyang: Singapore As a Case Study
Presenter: Keng We Koh, Nanyang Technological University

Paper Abstract:
Nanyin, a traditional form of music associated with the southern regions in China, had been part of the history of Chinese migration to Southeast Asia. Like many traditional arts in the region, this musical genre has faced challenges in the form of changing socio-political and cultural environments for the Chinese populations in these regions, notably in terms of language, the cultural forces of globalization, and the personal processes of what it means to be Chinese and other identities at the same time for these communities. What is the history of this genre in Southeast Asia, and how has this genre evolved in its history in the region in the last two centuries? How has Nanyin survived or transformed in the context of these forces in post-1945 Southeast Asia? What does Nanyin mean for practitioners today, and for the audiences? This study hopes to engage some of these questions by examining the challenges and adaptations of Nanyin in Singapore as a case study. While noting the uniqueness of the Singapore context, we believe that the history of Nanyin in Singapore provides an interesting lens into its history in the wider region.

Paper 4:
Lessons from a Cat: What Can a Cat Teach Us about Identity and the Politics of Language in Singapore Theatre?
Presenter: Wah Guan Lim, University of New South Wales

Paper Abstract:
In contemporary Singapore, the use of multiple languages and constant code switching has come to be generally accepted and even regarded as "orthodox" in Singaporean literature, cinema, and theatre. Yet, the state-run local media (television, radio) often portrays another reality: each ethnic group speaking a standard, fluent and pure mother tongue. This paper surveys how the theatre has attempted to challenge this state-sanctioned identity since the 1980s. In particular, Kuo Pao Kun's (1939–2002) reemergence in the 1980s saw the beginning of a new chapter for the localization of theatre and identity in Singapore. Kuo's magnum opus "Mama Looking for Her Cat" (1988) was the first multilingual play in the nation's history that encapsulated a holistic Singaporean experience by performing in six local languages commonly used on the island-state. Almost three decades later, poet and playwright Alfian Sa'at's (b. 1977) "GRC", or "Geng Rebut Cabinet" (2015),

performed by a primarily Malay cast in three languages, similarly evokes a sense of commonality through its alienation strategy. More than reflecting the ethnic and cultural diverse makeup in society, I argue that these hybrid multilingual plays reflect the tussle of power and politics among languages veiled behind the multicultural reality of the nation-state.

Panel: H036 - Toward a Political Theory of Southeast Asia: After the Anticolonial
Time: 4:00 PM - 5:30 PM
Location: HCC - Meeting Room 200 (Second Level)

Panel Abstract:
This panel explores mid-twentieth-century Southeast Asia through intellectual history, the history of political thought, and political theory, working toward theorising "Southeast Asia" in the wake of decolonisation. Where the first half of the twentieth century was rich with emancipatory anticolonial possibility, the middle decades (1940s–1960s) are better understood as a period of closure. This panel examines the political thinking of this moment as an intellectual–political activity taking place in the context of a new problem-space, one characterised by the hardening of new nation-state borders, reassertion of imperialism, consolidation of power by local political elites, and growing Cold War rivalry. … In addition to bringing the methods and central themes in intellectual history and political theory to the study of Southeast Asia, these papers also revisit the enduring question of spatialisation within Southeast Asian studies, asking what problems and answers we can illuminate when we gather studies of disparate intellectual projects under the sign of "Southeast Asia."

Paper 1:
In the Wake of Disconnection: Labor Immobility and Political Thought in the Bay of Bengal, 1940–1960
Presenter: Kelvin Ng, Yale University

Paper Abstract:
The middle decades of the twentieth century (1940–60) witnessed an unprecedented period of closure and disconnection in the eastern Indian Ocean. This paper examines the intellectual transformation of Tamil political thought in the context of colonial Malaya across these two tumultuous decades, reinterpreting the closure of the Bay of Bengal as productive of unexpected political openings. It situates shifts in Tamil diasporic politics—from an earlier emphasis on associational reformism and Indian nationalism, to a commitment to labor unionism and communist internationalism—within the context of immobility and the disruption of networks of circulatory migration. It argues that the turn toward labor as a modality of claims-making—organised around the solidarities formed between Tamil and Chinese workers—emerged from the sundering of political and familial links between South India and Malaya, lending a particular urgency to the project of reimagining the boundaries of political community. It draws on news reports, speeches, and opinion editorials in Tamil, Chinese and Malay vernacular newspapers in Malaya, with a focus on two major leaders of the Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions: S. Ganapathy and P. Veerasenan. Departing from an earlier historiographical focus on networks and

connections, I draw together intellectual history and political economy to argue that such shifts in Tamil political thought provide a new frame for understanding the history of decolonisation, and the novel intellectual projects that may emerge in its wake.

Paper 3:
Political Founding after Anticolonialism: Rural Development and Self-Reliance in 1960s Malaya
Presenter: Yi Ning Chang, Harvard University

Paper Abstract:
This paper uses 1960s Malaya to offer political theory a novel account of decolonization as counterrevolutionary political founding. Focusing on Malaya in 1960–65, it reads the Malayan political elite Abdul Razak bin Hussein's (1922–1976) policymaking on rural development as a project of political founding. It first reconstructs the world Razak presented in his speeches, recasting his conceptualizations of rural development as confrontations with problems central and universal to founding. It then argues that in Razak's political practices we see a kind of founding that suppressed its own democratic possibilities, which the paper terms counterrevolutionary founding. The paper theorizes Malayan founding, showing that it as underwritten by a politics of racial anticommunism, that it served to close the space for democratic contestation in independent Malaya, and that it deployed a certain conception of "self-reliance" to protect the state from the people's demands. The paper demonstrates one approach to developing a political theory of and for Southeast Asia, while also contributing to political theory's studies of decolonization and postcolonialism, founding, and democracy.

Paper: Educating the Overseas Chinese: "Chinese Universities" and China Studies in Cold War Asia
Presenter: Joshua Tan, University of California, Santa Cruz

In Panel: H015 - Producing China in Cold War Asia and Asian America
Time: 4:00 PM - 5:30 PM
Location: Boston Sheraton Hotel - Berkeley (3rd Floor)

Paper Abstract:
The demise of Chinese-language schooling in decolonizing Southeast Asia is widely cited by heritage activists as a casualty of nationalism and nation-building. In British Malaya and Singapore for example, Sinophone educational and cultural spaces were exemplary illustrations of the "problems of the overseas Chinese" – which had to be rectified by a state-led pedagogical project of Malayanization. Yet, as recent scholarship in Cold War cultural studies has suggested, the story of Sinophone schooling is neither one limited to local or national histories, *nor* simply a linear narrative of state-suppression of (Chinese) communism. Drawing on the archives of the British Inter-University Council and various American state and non-state institutions, this paper focuses instead on Anglo-American techniques of co-optation in "Chinese" higher-education. I draw attention to various proposals in the early 1950s to establish institutions of higher-education for the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia. Notably, they envisioned Western-educated Chinese elites uplifting the

unenlightened masses of Chinese in Southeast Asia, as a means of containing communism and producing alternative conceptions of China and Chineseness. Although many of these plans did not eventuate—hence, their being buried in the archives—they reveal a genealogy of a diasporic Chineseness compatible with national and capitalist modernity, underpinned by American hegemony in Cold War Asia.

Paper: Migration Governance Futures: Transience, Resilience, and Social Care
Presenter: Marina Kaneti, National University of Singapore

In Panel: H039 - Migration and Transnationalism
Time: 4:00 PM - 5:30 PM
Location: Boston Sheraton Hotel - Olmsted (5th Floor)

Paper Abstract:
In late December 2021, the government of Bangladesh announced a long-awaited agreement with Malaysia for the recruitment of low-skilled migrant workers. Although it was three years in the making, the timing of the memorandum of understanding was hardly surprising: severe labor shortages are threatening economic recovery efforts in a number of migrant-receiving countries, such as Malaysia. At the same time, migrant-sending countries, such as Bangladesh, are eager to secure remittance flows as part of efforts to restart their domestic economy. With over 107 million migrants from Asia living outside their country of origin, governments across the continent – from Dhaka and Kuala Lumpur, to Tokyo and Hanoi, Taipei and Jakarta – are hard at work, coining both new bilateral agreements and domestic policies on labor migration.
This paper explores how the Covid-19 pandemic affected the organization of migration governance. Using original data from four countries in Southeast Asia, the paper traces the ways in which governments and non-government entities have sought to override and potentially transform the complex system of migration outsourcing and soften the political, economic, and social repercussions from displays of migrants' extreme state of precarity. The paper argues that the stakes of reforming migration governance in Asia concerns more than just a mandate on better employment policies. For societies heavily dependent on expendable, low-cost migrant labor, the future might be nothing less than a choice between extreme precarity and automation.

Paper: Central-State Conflict and Coordination in Malaysia: Transformation amidst Tumult
Presenter: Tricia Yeoh, Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs

In Panel: J027 - Territorial Politics in the Era of the Pandemic: Central-Local Power Relations in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand
Time: 5:45 PM - 7:15 PM
Location: Boston Sheraton Hotel - The Fens (5th Floor)

Paper Abstract:
While Malaysia is set up as a constitutional federation, it is highly centralized in practice, with the federal government responsible for key public policy matters including education and public healthcare. From independence until

2018, this centralization was exacerbated by the single-party dominance of UMNO at the federal level. At the 2018 14th General Election, this changed when the opposition coalition Pakatan Harapan rose to power, but only for a short-lived 22 months before it was toppled by a new government. Between 2018 and 2021, four different federal governments presided over an exceedingly tumultuous political environment, further complicated by COVID-19 management from 2020 onwards. This presentation examines central-state conflict and coordination in Malaysia over the four-year period between 2018 and 2022. Against the backdrop of rapid political changes both at federal and state levels, and an unprecedented public health crisis, how are federal-state relations being transformed?

Roundtable: J025 - Forging the Road Ahead: Women in (post)Colonial Southeast Asia
Time: 5:45 PM - 7:15 PM

Participants: Barbara Andaya, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (chair); Christina Firpo, California Polytechnic State University, Taomo Zhou, Nanyang Technological University, Chie Ikeya, Rutgers University and Guo Quan Seng, National University of Singapore (discussants).
Location: HCC - Meeting Room 104 (Plaza Level)

Roundtable Abstract:
During this conversational-style roundtable, the discussants will offer short reflections on their own work and on the position of women (as both contributors and subjects) in competing visions of modernity in Southeast Asia. This panel situates the status of women in the context of major historical events and transformations across the 20th and 21st century, from colonialism and capitalism to religious reform and political crises.

Tani Barlow encouraged scholars of Asia to consider multiple models of modernity and introduced the notion of gendered modernity to the field of Asian studies and beyond. Her work has been hugely influential, and, combined with Tamara Loos' and Ann Stoler's interventions in the history of sexuality in Southeast Asia, this body of scholarship has problematized prior understandings of modernity and identities. This panel revisits competing visions and realities of what it meant to be modern in Southeast Asia, and the role of women in shaping them. We will ask: how do women contribute to these visions? How are women used to realize these visions? What were women's experiences in these modernities? How do class, ethnicity, religion, and age influence women's role in these modernities? And finally, how do such analyses of women-centered experiences inform broader understandings of social, cultural, economic, and political transformations in the region?

Unlike other sub-regions of Asia, the history of women in modern Southeast Asian history is surprisingly understudied. This round table will explore how the study of women in modernity allow us to better understand dynamics relevant to Southeast Asia, and investigate the contribution of women's experiences to broader scholarly questions. Scholars on this panel argue that the experience of women, and their (often but not necessarily agentic) contribution, is necessary to fully grasp the region's multiple entanglements with "modernity/ies" in a variety of fields.

SUNDAY, MARCH 19

Paper: Affective Mobilization: Anti-LGBT Campaigns Among Islamists in Malaysia and Indonesia
Presenter: HEW Wai Weng Hew, National University of Malaysia

In Panel: K015 - Language, Affect, and the Politics of Personhood in East and Southeast Asia
Time: 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM
Location: HCC - Meeting Room 203 (Second Level)

Paper Abstract:
On 29 April 2021, Associate Professor Rafidah Hanim, a female activist of ISMA (Malaysian Muslim Solidarity, an Islamist right-wing organization) and a university medical lecturer, posted on Facebook that she noticed an LGBT-themed comic book being sold at a few bookstores in Malaysia. She urged netizens to complain to the bookstores and report to the Ministry of Internal Affairs to counter 'the normalization of LGBT' and the 'creeping LGBT-isation'. Such posting is common on her Facebook, in which she often makes statements that spread hate and fear toward various ethnic, religious, and gender minorities. This paper examines anti-LGBT discourses and activism among Islamists in Malaysia and Indonesia, focusing on Felix Siauw and his teams in Indonesia and Rafidah Hanim and ISMA in Malaysia. It explores the languages and discourses these groups use to justify their homophobic campaigns, which include 'defending family values', 'protecting local culture', 'decolonizing human rights', 'upholding religious freedom' and 'against western neo-colonialism'. It also investigates how they evoke and play to a range of strong emotions to gather support for their anti-LGBT campaigns.

Paper: From Passion to Morals: The Taming of Gender in Two Genres of Malay Manuscript Texts.
Presenter: Maznah Mohamad, National University of Singapore

In Panel: K027 - Retellings of the Malay World through Early Texts: Faith, Love, Life, and Afterlife
Time: 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM
Location: HCC - Meeting Room 200 (Second Level)

Paper Abstract:
One way of tracing how the subjectivity of being gendered has evolved or shifted over the long duration would be to look at how emotions, passion and desires had been allowed to either be vented or restrained. A comparison of two contesting sets of Malay manuscript texts produced between the 17th to the 19th centuries reveal that the concept of gender being different, and unequal, had to be taught and transmitted over the centuries. On the one hand, there are works of Malay poetry in the form of pantun and syair unabashedly celebrating passion, lust and desire, and on the other, are also didactic and instructional manuals on sex and male-female proper conduct. This presentation will examine collections of Malay poetry from the 17th century, generically named the *Syair Cinta Berahi* (Ballad of passionate love) and compare these with another set of Islamic moralising texts as in *the Ilmu Annisak, Hikayat*

Siti Fatimah, Hikayat Fartana Islam and Syair Suluh Pegawai which may have appeared at a later period (from the 18th century onwards) in the Malay world.

Paper: Malaya's Political Exiles and Their Anticolonial Struggles Beyond the Rain Forests
Presenter: Zardas Lee, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

In Panel: L026 - Marginal Subjects in Southeast Asia and Beyond: Networks, Mobility, and Questions of Centrality in the Twentieth Century
Time: 10:45 AM - 12:15 PM
Location: HCC - Meeting Room 104 (Plaza Level)

Paper Abstract:
In June 1948, after three European planters were shot dead in British Malaya, the colonial administration enforced the state of Emergency. Six months later, the Malayan Communist Party launched a war against the regime. In response, the government brutally suppressed the Malayan Communist Party. It also expelled, detained, and executed numerous suspected communists. The violent struggles involving the Malayan Communist Party and the British Commonwealth forces have since dominated historical memory of late colonial Malaya.
This paper, however, turns the focus on an oft-overlooked aspect of Malaya's final decade. It explores Malaya's political exiles and their non-violent struggles in imperial metropole from 1950 to 1957. In the first few years of the Malayan Emergency, John Eber and Gerald de Cruz fled to Britain. As former members of the Malayan Democratic Union, Eber and de Cruz persisted in political activism in Britain and advocated Malaya's independence. This paper will show how Eber and de Cruz worked in the orbit of the Congress of Peoples against Imperialism, the largest socialist and anticolonial organization in postwar Europe. It will analyze how and why their critiques of imperialism focused on the restructuring of global economy and international organizations. And by juxtaposing the anticolonial efforts of Malayan and Kenyan exiles in Britain in the 1950s, I will argue for the importance of internationalism in independence struggles of smaller colonies. Overall, this paper will contribute to our understanding of Malaya, Afro-Asian relations, and the global history of anticolonialism.

Panel: L014 - The Art of the Borderland across South and Southeast Asia
Time: 10:45 AM - 12:15 PM
Location: HCC - Meeting Room 205 (Second Level)

Panel Abstract:
"The Art of the Borderland across South and Southeast Asia" explores the geographical contiguities across South and Southeast Asia through a focus on regional art, visual and public cultures, and media practices. By drawing attention to the inter-Asian borderland through a consideration of the region's aesthetic practices, the conference highlights regional narratives of modern and contemporary art that diversify critiques of master narratives of national modernities, our understanding of art worlds as plural and the study of the particular discourses and criteria that inform contemporary art as a global phenomenon. It also shows the way visual, public, and media cultures of the inter-Asian borderland enact

imaginaries of space and place that transgress and challenge the region's regard as territorially bounded and fixed. Further, the conference presentations showcase what material practices in the borderlands of South and Southeast Asia reveal about the modern and contemporary visual culture of the state.

Drawing on research conducted in northeast India, Malaysia, and Singapore, the panel seeks to engender a discussion of Asia that exceeds conventional understandings of space shaped by the area studies paradigm. Focused on sites that are often regarded as peripheries of South and/or Southeast Asia, "The Art of the Borderland" challenges their dominant image as aberrant sites of marginality and/or exceptionality, strengthening the regard for this borderland region as the ground from which to study and theorize Asia's pasts and present.

Paper 1: Sea and Land: Tepo Mat on Omadal Island
Presenter: Simon Soon and Yusra Zulkifli, Universiti Malaya

Paper Abstract:
The Tepo is a woven pandanus mat made by Bajau women. In addition to fulfilling domestic use such as sleeping or receiving guests, the mats' iconography express significant cultural value. Their use is reserved for important festivities and religious ceremonies. Growing demand for tepo as craft commodity has created new opportunities for cooperation between two of Omadal Island's segregated communities.
Omadal Island is home to the historically nomadic Bajau, who lived off the sea by trading and subsistence fishing. Over time, a segment of the Bajau population has abandoned boat living in favour of a more sedentary lifestyle. Omadal island had one of the earliest Bajau settlements, serving as a gateway to a strategic port for the Borneo mainland.

Today, the island is home to two segregated communities who share a similar language and culture. A divided landscape cuts across the island. An outnumbered but economically privileged land-owning Land Bajau has proprietary rights over the island with Malaysian citizenship. While a larger population of recent stateless Sea Bajau settlers live in stilt-houses on water, given only regulated access to island resources.

Working together, however, sets into motion a complex system of exploitation and goodwill. This paper explores how the political economy of mat-weaving and the design features of the tepo intervene in the pre-existing social hierarchies of Omadal, recalls a gendered embedded memory practice and provides new terms of collaboration for understanding, what James Scott calls, the 'hidden transcript' of the island's divided landscape.

Paper 2: Reorientation and Representations of Originary Landing in the SG Bicentennial's "Time Traveller"
Presenter: Jill J. Tan, Yale University

Paper Abstract:
In place of accounting for the originary violence of Singapore's colonization by the British, narrations of Singapore's history celebrate colonial origins and development as integral to

the country's future becoming. Between 2018-2020, the nation-wide "SG Bicentennial: From Singapore to Singaporean" campaign was held in commemoration of British colonization and rule of Singapore from 1819-1963. This paper analyzes the SG Bicentennial Experience's "Time Traveller" multimedia performance, and the annotated timeline circulated as part of the campaign. It examines the contrasting presentation of two pivotal moments in Singapore's history – the landing of English East India Company officer Stamford Raffles in 1819 along the Singapore River, with the "Fall of Singapore" to the Japanese in 1942.

The SG Bicentennial's narration of Singapore's origins and turning points falls within a Derridian framing of the iterability and alteration via repetition of originary law in order to conserve itself. As the show chronicles the dawning of 1819, the viewer's perspective shifts, placing them in the hold of the colonial vessel of the East India Company at sea approaching the shores of the territory of Singapore. The viewer becomes part of this landing, discovery, arrival, beginning. British colonialism is naturalized, and the viewer, the Singaporean, is interpolated into the discovery narrative rather than being placed on land awaiting colonization. In the carefully choreographed movements in the passage between founding violence and representations of founding myths, these forms of celebration and commemoration produce remembrance and recognition on one hand, and elisions and amnesic misrecognition on the other.

Paper: What Remains: Micro-Rituals in a Singaporean Crematorium
Presenter: Ruth E Toulson, Maryland Institute College of Art

In Panel: L017 - Cultures of Cremation: Entanglements of the Material and the Social
Time: 10:45 AM - 12:15 PM
Location: HCC - Meeting Room 202 (Second Level)

Paper Abstract:
In Singapore, from the 1980s onwards, cremation has been the predominant way to dispose of the dead. Following independence, the clearance of burial grounds and the strong encouragement of cremation were key acts in the making of the nation. Indeed, although Singaporean Chinese initially resisted cremation, strongly preferring burial, cremation is now so accepted that it has become a marker of ethnic Chineseness.

Within the literature on Singaporean deathscapes, there is a tendency to imagine the shift from burial to cremation as a simple unilinear progression. Theorists interpreted the acceptance of cremation as a sign of the declining importance of clan-allegiance and of ritual. Cremation was presented as a sterile practice that articulated little more than the centrality of the nation-state. This analysis leaves cremation as an unexamined, ritual-free end-point.

Instead, in this paper, drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, I reveal the crematorium as a highly-politicized place laden with unexpected ritual. Some of this is ritual overt – bone picking

ceremonies meant to replicate the removal of bones from a grave – but much of it is hidden**,** micro, implicit. Even bureaucratic actions become culturally particular moments for ritual. Further, cremation is not a fixed end-point but a shifting practice, with the growing popularity of disposal at sea, the opening of highly elaborate private columbaria and, in 2021, the introduction of a new garden of rest for ash scattering. And nation-making, and unmaking, with the bodies of the dead, continues long after independence.

Panel: L029 - Across Disciplines: Humans and Elephants in Southeast Asia
Time: 10:45 AM - 12:15 PM
Location: HCC - Meeting Room 111 (Plaza Level)

Panel Abstract:
Elephants range across distances, crossing boundaries to find food. As our panel will demonstrate, scholarly discussions of human-elephant relationships must also cross borders. Bringing together scholars from psychology, forest ecology, and history, our panel examines relationships between humans and elephants in Southeast Asia through multidisciplinary presentations. Building on environmental studies and cognitive ethology work from Donna Haraway, Robert Cribb, and Brett Walker as well as historical and scientific elephant research from Thomas Trautmann, Sujit Sivasundaram, Richard Corlett, Ahimsa Campos-Arceiz, and Ee Phin Wong, we will ground a discussion of human-elephant relationships in the diverse historical and cultural contexts of Southeast Asia. These relationships, from conflict to peaceful co-existence, are the subject of four presentations. Our discussant, historian Jonathan Saha, will contribute comments informed by his recent work on elephants in Burma.

Paper 2:
A Review of Traditional Human-Elephant Relations Among the Indigenous Communities of the Malay Peninsula
Presenter: Teckwyn Lim, University of Nottingham Malaysia

Paper Abstract:
The traditions of a community play an important role in determining its behaviour towards elephants. Whether a community traditionally sanctioned hunting elephants, eating their meat, or using ivory depends on its values, world view, belief system, higher-order attitudes and norms. Each of these factors is, in turn, influenced by various other inter-related factors. The functionalist approach to human values, views a community's collective values as adaptive traits. These traits are often influenced by the community's traditional source of energy: whether it is from foraging, from farming or from fossil fuels. Members of ethno-linguistic groups that were traditionally foragers often have quite different beliefs and behaviours towards animals compared with people who were traditionally farmers. With this context, this paper reviews the traditional cultural relationship between indigenous communities and elephants in the Malay Peninsula. It examines the groups' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour towards elephants. All communities traditionally treated elephants with respect, considering them to be non-human persons. There are differences between the practices of the cultural groups, including the

foragers, the swiddeners, and the settlers. Most groups had taboos against eating elephant meat but some swiddeners and settlers would kill and eat persistent crop-raiders.

Paper 4:
Elephants and Empire: Making and Unmaking Resistance in British Malaya
Presenter: Faizah B Zakaria, Nanyang Technological University

Paper Abstract:
While the historical lives of elephants during colonial rule have gained attention of animal studies scholars, less attention has been paid to their role in resistance against European imperialism. Here, British Malaya provides an interesting case study. From the late 1870s to the 1890s, elephants were instrumental for Malay political leaders who sought to evade the imposition of colonial rule, mount armed resistance against British outposts and/or navigate the forested borderlands to elude capture. This paper examines how elephants figured into the resistance strategies in a critical conflict: the Pahang Uprising of 1890s, which led to the emergence of folk hero Mat Kilau, the son of a Malay elephant keeper known as Tok Gajah ("grandfather of elephants"). Using indigenous writings such as Hikayat Pahang in tandem with British colonial archival documents and hunting memoirs, as well as press interviews with the man who claimed to be Mat Kilau who later surfaced in Thailand, this paper tracks the relationship between Pahang Malays and their elephants and how tamed elephants were essential in providing support to rebels against the British colonial forces. Arguably, the reach of British political power into the forests depended on disrupting the interface between tamed and wild elephants through a spatial reorganization. The subsequent establishment of Malaysia's first national park, Taman Negara in Pahang in 1930, could thus be read as the apotheosis of such efforts.

Paper: To See What He Would Call Them: The Politics of Place-Naming and Ecological Neo-Imperialism in Spratly Islands
Presenter: Samuel Yu-sum Lee, New School University

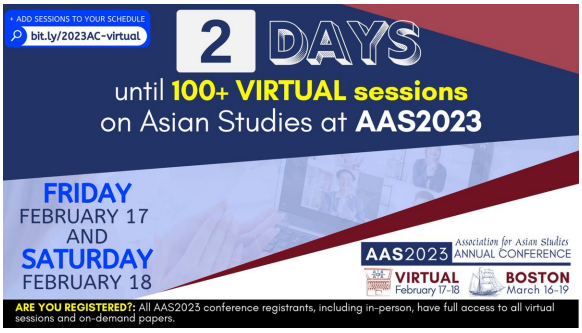
In Panel: L009 - Ecopoliticizing the Land through Chinese Language, Media, and Culture
Time: 10:45 AM - 12:15 PM
Location: Boston Sheraton Hotel - Fairfax B (3rd Floor)

Paper Abstract:
Around South China Sea, sovereign states like Vietnam, Philippine, Malaysia and China extend their territorial claim to Spratly Islands by various means. One of them is naming. Alongside "Spratly Islands" that is clearly identified by British colonizers, the names vary from Nansha Islands (南沙群島), Quần đảo Trường, Kepulauan Spratly, Gugusan Semarang Peninjau to Kapuluan ng Kalayaan.

To justify their practice of territorialization, (re)naming a geographical location manifests the knowledge/power relations that strives for a legal recognition, as well as refills the social memory and ecological imagination in accordance with different sovereign powers' will. Hence, alongside the explicit military and social actions, naming becomes a disputed

political field, where different states justify the extension of territory and the access of natural resources. In this paper, I will borrow Carl Schmitt and Michel Foucault's ideas of naming and power to analyze the politics of place-naming in Spratly Islands and its ecological impact.

The threefold analysis includes the historical narratives of naming in that area, coupling between naming power and legal possessive right of the named objects, and historical-political determination in naming. At the end, not only because legal appropriation requires a name for dispossession and exploitation, but also because it changes the conception of nature, historical continuity and social imagination aligned with the name of that land.



Virtual Meeting, February 17-18, 2023 (Friday to Saturday)

The virtual session for the Annual Meeting of the AAS will be held on February 17-18. To view these panels, please register for the Annual Meeting. The times listed are in the US Eastern time zone. Please check with the AAS Conference website closer to the virtual meeting dates for technical information on how to access these synchronous panels/papers and the asynchronous on-demand papers.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 17

Panel: V1-112 - Gender, Law and Human Trafficking: Female Servitude in Colonial Southeast Asia
Time: 8:00 AM - 9:30 AM

Panel Abstract:
This panel seeks to examine forms of servitude and human trafficking that existed, historically, in Asian contexts during the colonial period and offers a gendered perspective on 'coercive' circulations across the South China Sea. We hope to contribute to historiography about slavery/trafficking regimes, and more broadly,

Chinese migration, by exploring connections between China and Southeast Asia in the mid-19th and early 20th century that reveal human trafficking, transnational labor networks, and discourses about legalities. Through an analysis of Chinese women and girls, the panel seeks to understand the definitions, practices, and experiences that shaped the nature of female servitude. It will consider some variants of in/voluntary labor to bring fore the commonalities and ambiguities that emerged as it developed in other parts of the globe beyond the Atlantic. Broadly speaking, the three paper presenters will address questions such as which groups of women/children were trafficked/'transferred', for what reasons, by whom, and under what legal conditions? The panel will attend to the social, cultural, and politico-legal dynamics that informed debates about this practice and highlight the tensions that emerged between colonial administrators, reformers, and the local Chinese community.

Paper 1:
Restricting Chinese Women's Mobility: Anti-Trafficking Campaigns in Interwar Southeast Asia
Presenter: Julia Martinez, Humanities and Social Inquiry

Paper Abstract:
From 1924 to 1937 the League of Nations extended its global investigation into the so-called traffic in women and children for the sex industry in Southeast Asia, with a particular focus on immigrant Chinese women. The notion that Chinese women who travelled overseas were vulnerable to sexual exploitation was a common refrain in colonial discourse since the 1870s, much discussed in the literature. This stereotype was couched in a gendered, racialized language, with European colonists portrayed as protectors of women and girls. In the League of Nations report published in 1933, authorities were primarily concerned over women trafficked for the purpose of prostitution, as opposed to women contracted for domestic service or arranged marriage. But as colonial authorities closed down registered brothels, and prostitution became inadmissible as a reason for immigration, attempts to categorise women travellers were increasingly fraught. This paper takes a comparative approach, with case studies from the Netherlands Indies (Indonesia), Singapore and the Philippines, and considers how colonial governments implemented regimes of surveillance, detention and deportation, with the aim of reporting to the League of Nations. For young girls in Batavia, Singapore and Manila there were rescue homes, built with Chinese community support, where girls were trained to be servants or housewives. For young women, there were detention centres from which women might be cleared and released, or deported. These new restrictions on Chinese women's mobility in Southeast Asia did little to protect women, but rather by potentially criminalizing their movements left them more vulnerable to exploitation.

Paper 2:
"Girls Sold like Cattle": *Mui Tsais* and the Making of a Female Underclass in the Straits Settlements
Presenter: Hema Kiruppalini, Asia Research Institute (NUS)

Paper Abstract:
This paper attempts to historicize the mui tsai ('little sisters' in Cantonese) system in the Straits Settlements during the early 20th century, and builds on existing scholarship on the subject in the context of Asia. The transfer of young girls from China into bond service and contending perspectives about whether the mui tsai system was a cultural tradition or a form of child exploitation gave rise to their ambiguous social status. By some accounts, the *mui tsais* were never considered 'slaves' but instead were regarded as 'adopted daughters' since families engaged in an informal contract that facilitated the 'gifting' – rather than the 'trafficking' – of young girls to affluent Chinese families. However, serious criticisms about the system led to colonial intervention to abolish the practice through laws and legislation. Through an analysis of colonial office records, newspaper reports and life history accounts, this paper seeks to trace the interrelated of issues 'adoption', advocacy, and abolition and in so doing, assess how knowledge production about the mui tsai system shaped the making of a female underclass in the Straits Settlements. It will also examine how discourses about domestic servitude became embedded in discourses about religious philanthropy, welfare, and education to understand the shifts that promoted social reform.

Paper: *Orang Minyak*: Singapore's Oiled Bodies between 1958 and 1978
Presenter: Kenneth Tay, Singapore Art Museum

In Panel: V1-105 - Visual Strata: Cultures of the Geologic in Asia
Time: 8:00 AM - 9:30 AM
Paper Abstract:
In 1958, a series of orang minyak (oily man) feature films were produced, right around the time when Singapore was rapidly urbanising and major oil companies such as Shell and BP were setting up refinery bases. These films, based on the urban legend of a black oil-coated monster, signaled an anxiety with the new speed, mobility and bodily relations engendered by petro-modernity. Twenty years after, in 1978, Singapore witnessed its greatest ever industrial accident at the Jurong Shipyard, when the oil tanker S.T. Spyros exploded due to the crew's attempt to mix crude oil and bunker fuel in order to report lower fuel consumption. The Spyros accident severely marred Singapore's then-developing image as a clean and safe environment, with victims left completely burnt and not unlike the black, oil-coated body of the orang minyak. Through the films, news reports and archival images, I examine these two moments as a visual archive of Singapore's 'oiled bodies' in order to foreground the presence of oil in the economic development of Singapore's global city. Significantly, the decades between these two moments (1958–1978) are also anchored by: (1) the national branding of Singapore as a "Global City" (Rajaratnam 1972); and (2) the oil crises of 1973 and 1979. While Singapore is not an oil-producing nation, its role as a global node in the processing and transshipment of crude oil cannot be

underestimated. Reading these 'oiled bodies' today allows us to perform a counter-shot to the state's recent attempts to greenwash Singapore's image.

Paper: Overflow - History of Land Reclamation in Borneo
Presenter: Nurfadzilah Yahaya, Yale University

In Panel: V1-205 - Property and Legal Regimes in the Indian Ocean World
Time: 10:30 AM - 12:00 PM

Paper Abstract:
Land reclamation occurred throughout the British Empire from the late nineteenth century onwards. The process of reclamation involved a lot of specialised equipment, hiring experts on geography, hydrology, cartography, as well as engineers and surveyors not to mention the labourers who would do the actual construction. British authorities saw in new territory opportunities for potential deliverance from shortage of resources, and the possibility of a clean slate right at their doorstep. In British colonies in Southeast Asia, sand came from either surrounding regions behind the coast line or riverbeds. In European colonies throughout Southeast Asia, coastal lands became *frontiers* not in the sense of wilderness that must be discovered and peopled per se, but in another sense, as areas that could use development in terms of infrastructure in order to attract yet more people to come. For port-cities, most forms of human activity are concentrated along the waterfront so the coasts were not marginal spaces. This paper focuses on Sandakan in northeast Borneo which was historically, a complex and multi-layered jurisdiction. Although formally a British Protectorate since 1888, Japan, the Philippines, Brunei continued to jockey for power in Sandakan. The Sandakan Reclamation Project began in 1920 funded by British North Borneo Company and local merchants. Contributions of private enterprise discourage British officials in London from funding land reclamation projects in the colonies.

Panel: V1-412 - Ecological Imaginaries in Southeast Asia: Histories and Futurities
Time: 8:00 PM - 9:30 PM

Panel Abstract:
Southeast Asia is a region characterised by rich biodiversity as well as biocultural urgencies, where the natural world is frequently understood through an extractivist and technocapitalist lens (Ryan 2017, 7). Under colonial rule, the preservationist and conservationist discourse taking place in America and Europe in the late nineteenth century were not seen as applicable to the natural environs of Southeast Asia. In the twentieth century, the consolidation of modern nation-states alongside a strongly developmentalist agenda resulted in the further marginalisation of environmentalism in the region. Historically and culturally, many popular ecological imaginaries, especially relating to tropicality and the wilderness in this region, are conceptually negative.
In this panel, our papers examine the way selected historical, cultural, and creative texts in the region negotiate the non-integration of the ecological in colonial and post-independence periods. Presenters delve into the historical

archive of the US Empire to discern the environmental discourse that shaped US policies regarding its annexation of the Philippines; reinterpret botanical poetry in Singapore in terms of the Colombian exchange to theorise a modern tropicality; and advance ecofeminism as a mode of creative and personal praxis to imagine new psychogeographical and ecospiritual terrains. Featuring the Philippines and Singapore, two countries where artistic and cultural productions must frequently confront a disjunction from their precolonial pasts and natural spaces, our papers discuss histories and futurities to open up new conversations about similar lacunae in other parts of Southeast Asia.

Paper 2:
Towards a Tropical Modernism in Singapore: Reading Ho Poh Fun
Presenter: Ann Ang, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University

Paper Abstract:
With the recent increase in ecological writing from Singapore, much of the intellectual discourse relating to ecopoetics focuses on questions of sustainability and natural heritage. Occurring across genres as wide-ranging as non-fiction, the personal essay and poetry, such new writing appears to counter-balance a technocratic emphasis on urbanisation, leading to the assumption that nature in Singapore is primarily understood in cultivated and human-centric formats. An unfortunate corollary is the non-recognition of an ecopoetics that pre-dates recent developments, while critical writing on Anglophone poetry in Singapore predominantly relies on sociohistorical frames.

To address this, my presentation examines a lesser-known female poet, Ho Poh Fun, in order to propose tropical modernism as a framework for reading and localising ecological modernism in Southeast Asia. Ho's poem sequences "Climatological Reports" and "From a Naturalist Notebook" present an anti-realist and de-familiarised response to tropical flora, as a reflection of the dislocation of many commonly cultivated tree and ornamental species across the tropical belt. Emerging in conversation with Singapore's key modernist poet, Arthur Yap, Ho's aesthetics arguably forms a bridge between the romanticism of earlier work by Edwin Thumboo and the materialist and trans-local poetics of contemporary poets like Samuel Lee and Mok Zining. By theorising a tropical modernism through Ho's writing, this presentation makes a case for a broader ecopoetics that works alongside and through the after-histories of Southeast Asia's developmental policies.

Paper 3: In Fields and Forests; The Woman Makes Her Home Reading Ecofeminist Literature from Singapore
Presenter: Esther Vincent Xueming, The Tiger Moth Review

Paper Abstract:
Seamus Heaney and Eavan Boland both famously refer to the notion of the 'country of the mind' to describe the psychogeography of a place, where one's physical habitation and imagination work together to create a richer, fuller sense of home. How do disappearing landscapes like fields and forests find their way into the personal essays and prose poems of Singapore's eco literature? What kinds of home do they offer our women narrators and

speakers, and just how habitable and hospitable are they?

For this panel, I will refer to four specific works of eco literature written by Singapore women to discuss how homes are made in fields and forests real and imagined. What happens when these spaces move from the physical world into the woman's psychogeographical and ecospiritual terrain? Can they continue to nurture her even after they lose their physical presence and are transformed into concrete, man-made environments? What country does she inhabit in her mind, and how does she use literature to make herself a home on Earth within the context of rapid urbanisation? In fields and forests; the woman makes herself a home.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 18

Panel: V2-614 - Senses of Movement in Singapore Cinema
Time: 10:30 AM - 12:00 PM

Panel Abstract:
This panel responds to a vibrant wave of contemporary filmmaking from Singapore, by addressing the need for fresh theoretical insights, and re-conceiving the idea of national cinema. Although national specificity has been generative in the study of world film, the trope relies on cultural essentialism and rigid epistemologies. To avoid pitfalls within traditional approaches, these diverse and interdisciplinary papers adopt an alternative paradigm, "movement." Singapore, a site of constant development, migration, and trade, is profoundly defined by movement. Each project on this panel identifies a unique avenue to consider how themes of movement, repositioning, and change innervate the compelling aesthetic strategies found in Singaporean cinema since the mid-2010s. The films range from commercial narrative and art cinema productions, to experimental and documentary works. First, Elizabeth Wijaya reflects on films with abstract gestures that trigger affect and intertextual readings. These texts promote a cross-genre imaginary that performs tacit modes of political critique. Gerald Sim then highlights the city-state's role as a hub in global supply chains. He identifies movement within transnational flows of goods, people, and information, before proceeding to outline the imbricated formation of an infrastructural imagination and film style. Finally, Sophia Siddique discovers "entangled" forms of sensing

that enables Singaporean films to transcend cinema as a visual experience, thus proffering ways to map transnational networks of belonging. She concludes the trajectory of a panel that tracks the medium's expansive potential to record and reflect on society, economy, politics, and culture. Joanne Leow will serve as discussant.

Paper 1:
Exiled Memories: The Sense of Something Amiss in Recent Political Cinema of Singapore
Presenter: Elizabeth Wijaya, University of Toronto

Paper Abstract:
With its strict censorship laws, Singapore seems to harbor little space for political cinema. This presentation argues that to understand the political interventions of cinema in Singapore, it is critical to pay attention to the affective and suggestive qualities of the vague, tangential, and elliptical gestures deployed by filmmakers across different genres of contemporary cinema. In Liao Jiekai's fiction film *Red Dragonflies* (2010), a forest trek becomes an event of unencountered loss when a young student goes missing while walking on Keretapi Tanah Melayu's (KTM) railroad tracks. In Jason Soo's documentary, *1987: Untracing the Conspiracy* (2016), the filmmaker intercuts an ex-political detainee's re-enactment of a forced confession given under duress in 1987 with the footage of that confession that was televised in 1987. Inspired by the escape of the purported terrorist, Mas Selamat, from detention without trial, Charles Lim's video art *All Lines Flow Out*, commissioned by the Singapore Biennale in 2011, ends with a man adrift at sea, with the camera point of view submerged beneath the surface of the water. Through different aesthetic strategies, each of these scenes creates the sense of something amiss andgestures towards the unexpected ways repressed historical memories can return and unsettle the present. In *The Claim of Reason*, Stanley Cavell reminds us of the epistemological importance of recognizing the "initial threatening sense or fact of something amiss, something which must be accounted for." This presentation shows that investigating the "something amiss" in Singapore cinema reveals the richness of Singapore's understudied political cinema.

Paper 2:
Sublime Infrastructure: Supply Chain Capitalism and Singaporean Film Style
Presenter: Gerald Sim, Florida Atlantic University

Paper Abstract:
Recent Singapore cinema has tended to reify the substructural evolution of the nation's post-independence development on screen. Visually as well as narratively, the films thematize mobility, transience, and transition, while exhibiting an openness to engaging with the outside. These aesthetics represent the consequences of the city-state's strategic undertaking to leverage its geographic and economic positions in the global supply chain. Almost devoid of natural resources, Singapore evolved from a colonial port city into a shipping and transportation hub, before making massive infrastructural investments to support emerging sectors in financial services, petrochemical refining, telecommunications, marketing, e-commerce, and data colocation. The land-scarce

island is furthermore in perpetual redevelopment, causing what scholars have called spatial instability. These circumstances exacerbate the multicultural and cosmopolitan culture's struggle at self-definition. For almost two decades since the 1990s, Singapore cinema initially attempted to look inward in search of an unique identity. But as a national project, it failed to evade comparisons with postmodern nostalgia and pastiche. In that context, a newer cycle of films appears to be relinquishing essentialism. Instead, they foreground the country's choice to position itself in global capitalism as a transnational service hub. Informed by Anna Tsing's innovative work on supply chains and labor, these close readings of K. Rajagopal's *A Yellow Bird* (2016), and other films such as *Ilo Ilo* (2013), *IN TIME TO COME* (2017), *Shirkers* (2018), *Wet Season* (2019) and *Sementara* (2020) highlight alternative preoccupations with transitory movement that constitute the makings of an infrastructural film style.

Paper 3:
Entangled Sensing: Tracing Movement and Inter-Sensorial Perception in Pop Aye (Kirsten Tan, 2017)
Presenter: Sophia S Harvey, Vassar College

Paper Abstract:
Kirsten Tan's 2017 film, *Pop Aye*, can be mapped along multiple axes of movement. As a co-production supported by entities in Singapore and Thailand, it entailed international flows of capital. As a road film, its images traverse the landscape from Bangkok to Loei, Isan Province. As a collaborative endeavor, the film projects a transnational imaginary across the region. This paper argues for movement along the human and sentient non-human axis. It builds upon what film scholar Barbara Creed characterizes as the film's "entangled looking" (2018). For Creed, entangled looking positions spectators within an ethical orientation that "is about becoming animal, about asking us to adopt a look of greater reciprocity" (13). While Creed's initial analysis of *Pop Aye* is grounded primarily in the visual, this paper extends that work by performing an inter-sensorial analysis along additional registers of taste, touch, smell, and sound. It finds that the film oscillates between the inter-sensorial perceptions of Thana the human and Pop Aye the elephant. It is this inter-species, inter-sensorial movement that enriches the gesture of reciprocity that is at the heart of entangled sensing.

ON-DEMAND INDIVIDUAL PAPERS

On-demand presentations consist of Individual Papers presented independently (not within a session). These presentations will be pre-recorded and available for on-demand (asynchronous) viewing.

Paper:
The Curious Case of Mr. Kiasu: A Prehistory of a Singaporean Meme Machine from the 1980s to the 2000s
Presenter: Raymond Kun-Xian Shen, University of California, Los Angeles

Paper Abstract:
As part of a larger study that outlines the distinctive forms, aesthetics, and infrastructure of Singaporean humor across various platforms—a multimedia industry similar to what Susan Blackmore calls a "meme machine" or what Crystal Abidin calls a "meme factory"—this paper examines the historical development of a traveling trope/meme "Mr. Kiasu" as what Lauren Berlant and Aimee Bahng call a "cruelly optimistic" coping mechanism and mediating interface between the bureaucratic state and the civil society amidst ongoing social tensions in Singapore.

Based on a Hokkien expression that ridicules everyday Singaporeans who love to compete and thus act selfishly, the Singlish term *kiasu* (lit. afraid to lose) first gained wider circulation when a comic book figure Mr. Kiasu created by Johnny Lau became popular in the 1980s, the start of what was dubbed the "Asian Century" that saw intense urbanization and neoliberalization in Singapore and beyond. Unlike other forms of Singaporean humor (e.g. sitcoms) that Kenneth Tan criticizes as a "resistance in one-dimension," Mr. Kiasu enjoys popularity and survives beyond a single-author work, later adapted into a TV series, a web series, and a web group *Kiasu Memes for Singaporean Teens* in the early 2000s. Understanding Mr. Kiasu as the embodiment of the ambivalence of Singaporean humor caught between state policies and civil participation, the paper offers a summary of the development of the character, as well as an analysis of the positions and network of the key artists working in a media environment carefully monitored by the state.

Article

DOING DISABILITY IN PRACTICE: REFLECTIONS ON EDITING SINGAPORE'S FIRST DISABILITY STUDIES COLLECTION

Kuansong Victor Zhuang
Princeton University / Nanyang Technological University

Publishing a volume on disability and inclusion, based on disability studies principles, necessitates a rethinking of the ways in which we do research and publish. As one of the co-editors of *Not Without Us*[1], and a scholar working on disability in Singapore, I felt it was important to reflect on the process of doing so and how we can begin to challenge normative practices in curating a collection like this. This article takes the process of publishing this volume as its key starting point. I explain the reasons behind the volume before moving to discuss some considerations around how we tried to be inclusive in the production and publishing process.

Academically, disability studies has grown dramatically since its beginnings in the 1980s. Its emergence parallels that of the disability rights movement, which grew out of a desire of disabled people to advocate for self-representation and challenge their exclusion from society (Barnes 1991; Oliver 1990; Longmore 2003; Linton 1998). Today, disability studies is a vibrant field that cuts across many traditional disciplines. It is, as Garland-Thomson (2013) highlights, a field that has fully emerged. Yet, this emergence has also been critiqued for its Western centrism, or as Chris Bell (2010) argues, a disability studies that is based on the experiences of the white, male wheelchair. Others have highlighted the need for a Global South disability studies, and to reflect on the local exigencies that encapsulate disability experiences elsewhere (Meekosha 2011; Soldatic and Grech 2014).

Unknown to many, Singapore and Southeast Asia has had numerous intersections with global disability flows and the international disability rights movement. In 1981, disabled activists from around the world came to Singapore and founded the first cross-disability international organization of disabled people, Disabled Peoples' International. They also elected a Singaporean, Ron Chandran-Dudley as its first chairperson (Zhuang 2010a). Some of these international activists were instrumental in both the international disability movement and the formation of disability studies – Vic Finkelstein is regarded as a key intellectual of British disability studies, and Ed Roberts started the independent living movement in America. As a result of this early cross-fertilization of ideas about disability, the 1980s also witnessed a flourishing of disabled people's activism in Singapore where they actively advocated for their inclusion in society.

These reasons and Singapore's increased focus on inclusion has prompted us to curate a collection like this. We situate this volume within a recent emergence of research, articles and scholarly works that begins to critically examine disability in Singapore (Chua 2022; Goggin and Zhuang 2022; Holden 2020; Lee et al. 2019; Lee

et al. 2017; M.E. Wong and Law 2016; M.E. Wong and Lim 2021; M.E. Wong, Low, and Appelhans 2017; M.E. Wong et al. 2017; M.E. Wong et al. 2015; R. Wong and Wong 2015; Yang et al. Forthcoming; Zhuang 2010b, 2010a, 2016, 2018, 2020, 2021, 2023; Zhuang and Goggin Forthcoming). Our aim was that the volume could play an important role in setting out what disability studies in Singapore would look like, as my co-editors and I highlight in its introduction (Zhuang, Wong, and Goodley 2023). In the remaining half of this article, I move from the why of the volume to consider what it means to publish a volume on disability and inclusion; specifically, one that actively centres disability to reimagine normative practices especially around research and publishing.

As scholars, researchers and academics, we know the rules of the game. Research and writing are practices which we actively partake in, ultimately leading to publication. And this is also where we police what counts as research (or not), by setting boundaries to determine what is publishable or not. In the volume, that is a central question that we as editors grapple with. What counts as publishable in a volume that centres on disability? Whose research and experiences speak? What does speaking or writing mean?

Take for example the chapter that we began the volume with, titled "A Place at the Table: Who Gets to Speak in Singapore?" Written by Dawn-Joy Leong and Cavan Chang, it raises important questions of whose voices count in research that prioritises the written word. Can the visual – art – allow for individuals who are non-verbal and not fluent in writing to communicate their ideas and thoughts? Importantly, Cavan's section of the chapter, where his art forms a visual tapestry, speaks to his experiences and his unique perspectives of seeing the world communicate key perspectives about living with disability and should not be overlooked.

Producing a volume centred on inclusion also means being aware of how normative practice can be disabling. Siew Ling's chapter that follows builds on the same vein around communication as Dawn's and Cavan's. Initially written as shorter social media posts on Facebook, they tell of her life living with deaf-blindness and her experiences communicating with the world around her. Put together as a chapter, it makes important points about how access to technology (and its idiosyncrasies and failings) is crucial to her voice. Writing this short article in Microsoft word, I cannot but help see that technology is also key to the ways many of us work. Reviewing a chapter for publication would mean the use of functions in word like track changes and comments, which many of us take for granted. For Siew Ling (and other blind individuals), this feature is often inaccessible as they are confusing for screen readers and text to speech/braille software. So instead, we endeavoured to provide comments in the text itself, improvising with a system that allowed Siew Ling to read our comments and suggestions to her essay clearly.

The desire to be diverse and inclusive to encapsulate a range of perspectives was also key in our curation process. Given the newness of disability studies research in Singapore, contributors came from a range of diverse backgrounds – some from academia, some from

activist spaces, and others just starting out. Picking up the volume, the reader might recognize the wide diversity of form and medium – these range from interviews, short personal essays that adopt a critical perspective to lived experiences of disability, to more traditional research pieces that traverse a range of academic disciplines. This diversity is deliberate – we hope that this would allow contributors a suitable form to convey their thoughts on inclusion.

As important as form is that of quality, where we grappled with the need to deliver a coherent volume that speaks for disability studies in Singapore. In particular, we asked how the editors could support contributors, especially those new to academia and research, to produce work that exemplifies disability studies. As many of us might know, the publishing process is often dependent on the intellectual (and writing) capabilities of the author(s). The editors would decide if the piece makes the cut, and the review process would subsequently support the development of the piece. Rejections are common when revisions are unsatisfactory. Publish and perish, as some might say.

Right from the start, we decided that the editors should support this process, where contributors from a range of backgrounds have the required support and mentorship to produce something worthy of publication. When we launched the open call for proposals in March 2020, we offered time for consultations for interested contributors. Not all contributors needed this, but for those who did, we met, ideated and journeyed with them in their initial engagement with disability studies. There were writers who eventually did not manage to contribute, or who due to personal exigencies or other commitments fell out of the process. But in the almost three years that the volume was in development, the mentorship of the editors was readily available to those who needed them.

This is ultimately the main point of the piece – that normative practices in academia and publishing can potentially be disabling and debilitative. And I offer these reflections on our production process as a starting point and provocation to critically think through how we do, write, research and present our work and research, academically or elsewhere.

Endnote

[1] *Not Without Us: Perspectives on Disability and Inclusion in Singapore* is published by Ethos Books. For more info on the book, see https://www.ethosbooks.com.sg/products/not-without-us-perspectives-on-disability-and-inclusion-in-singapore

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Biographical Note
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Fieldnotes

Berita welcomes descriptions of in-progress fieldwork conducted by scholars

The following is Juliet M. Tempest's Fieldnotes in 2022

When people in Malaysia and Singapore learned meat was at the top of my mind, the chicken ban was always on the tip of their tongue.

The Malaysian government banned all chicken exports on June 1, 2022. Singapore had theretofore sourced all its fresh chicken (about one-third of its total chicken imports) from Malaysia; the island city-state imports over 90% of its food, including all its meat (SFA, 2020). Within one week, Malaysian officials relaxed the ban to permit export of *kampung* ("village," viz. free-range) chickens, partly in response to pressure from the Singaporean state. Still, Singapore began sourcing more chilled chicken from farther afield and tapping into its frozen reserves. Only on October 11 did Malaysia lift the ban entirely (CNA, 2022). *Halal* poultry is the top animal meat consumed in Malaysia and Singapore, respectively Asia's number one and two chicken consumers per capita (OECD, 2018). Like many other countries encountering supply chain disruptions during the pandemic, the lengths to which these governments went to protect their supplies demonstrate how tastes for meat and especially chicken pose national security concerns: Both states risked facing citizens dissatisfied with the taste of their chicken—or lack thereof.

I conducted ethnographic fieldwork at a processed meat factory outside Kuala Lumpur and food retail outlets around Singapore at the height of the export ban, from July to August 2022. As an anthropologist of food, I asked what tastes of and for different meats mean to people in Malaysia and Singapore. Of course, "meat" means many things. Literally, in English it possesses different connotations to "*daging*" in Malay or "*rou/yuhk*" in Mandarin/Cantonese: the former may imply beef and the latter pork if left unqualified. (I would welcome any related insights from Tamil-speaking colleagues.) Any such category is further fraught given proscriptions within these countries' largest religious communities around eating pork (for Muslims), beef (for some Buddhists and Hindus), or even all animal flesh (for other Buddhists and Hindus). I focused on chicken because it enjoys the fewest taboos across Malaysia's and Singapore's official ethno-religious groups: Chinese, Malay, Indian, and Other. All my dozen-plus interlocutors had tasted chicken. Granted, most of them were ethnic Chinese, and I did not have the chance to interview anyone who identified as Indian during this pilot study. Through interviews with Chinese and Malay meat producers and/as consumers, as well as observations of factory kitchens, production lines, grocery stores, wet markets, and hawker centers, I inquired into ideas around and experiences of eating chicken, whose cultural import increased in salience with the export ban. Angst over the export ban among producers and consumers alike captured the expectation of not just meat but specifically fresh chicken as a mainstay of Malaysian and Singaporean meals. This is despite the relatively recent proliferation of animal protein, as opposed to that derived from fish, seafood, or soy, in people's diets (Van Esterik, 2008). For this region where scientists trace the domestic chicken's wild ancestors (Eda, 2021), discussions of Malaysia's and Singapore's national and ethnic cuisines often assume their carnivorous—or avivorous—quality (Duruz and Khoo, 2015; Tarulevicz, 2013). Consider how chicken rice vies for the status of "national dish" in both countries, where people associate particular preparations with specific ethnic groups (Chou, 2015). State officials clearly shared this conviction with my lay-interlocutors, who still recognized chicken's dietary importance for others even in the rare cases that they did not prefer or enjoy eating it themselves. In Malaysia, officials jeopardized future trade relationships in an attempt to secure chicken for their populace; though interlocutors reported no relief from inflated prices from these measures. In Singapore, the government encouraged citizens to opt for chilled, frozen, and even plant-based alternatives on the basis of nutritional value rather than taste (CNA Insider, 2020).

All parties insisted they could taste the difference. In Singapore, many chicken rice stalls sooner closed than risk their reputation on serving frozen birds (Lim, 2022). Some of my Singaporean interlocutors refused to order chicken rice while the ban remained in effect. They claimed they could detect that fast food chains had swapped fresh with frozen for their fried chicken. State-sponsored media aired a taste test (N=6) tasking consumers to distinguish fresh from frozen chicken in signature ethnic preparations: poached (Chinese), fried (ordinarily associated with Malay cooking à la *ayam goreng*; however, here it was Japanese-inspired *karaage*), and curried (Indian), as well as

oven-roasted (Other, viz. "Western"). Participants fared best with the fried and curried, but the first stumped one-third and the last all (CNA Insider, 2022). Host Steven Chia made a point of mentioning the youngest, female participant failed to identify any dishes prepared with fresh chicken correctly—a "handicap" he attributed to her age.

Research in sensory anthropology has suggested that people train senses like taste according to cultural norms (e.g., Classen, 1997; Geurts, 2002; Luhrmann, 2020). If Chia implied that, with time, one could learn to taste for, say, fresh and frozen chicken, my interlocutors at the KL meat factory cultivate taste expertise through constant training. Quality assurance team members participate in regular "calibration" meetings to ensure their evaluation of a product's taste matches customer expectations. Managers often described these expectations in terms of "mass" tastes; on different occasions, two ethnic Chinese corrected themselves for referring first to "Malay" tastes. Just as wine specialists conduct "tastings," the factory's research and development staff do "cuttings," where they taste small pieces they cut from product samples. And just as wine tasters receive a cup to expectorate excess alcohol from their mouths, meat cutters also each use a cup, larger and opaque, to spit out chewed fragments of the sample. When I asked how long a bite should spend inside the mouth to get a sense of the taste, I received vague replies: "You just know." They maintain "trained sensory panelists," in the words of one manager in her twenties. The two panelists that I met both hailed from the same hometown in Nepal. Working through multiple language barriers, I learned that at least one had indeed undertaken on-the-job training, for he had never tasted chicken before joining the factory seven years prior. "I'm Buddhist," he explained. His responsibility as a sensory panelist entailed tasting products coming off six or so production lines every 30-60 minutes and scoring them in Excel spreadsheets on color, texture, thickness, size, etc., according to client specifications. "I like chicken," he said in response to my question. Then, unprompted, he continued, "But when I go home, I won't eat [it]." From these observations, I have developed a working hypothesis that what meat means in Malaysia and Singapore emerges transnationally, as this young Buddhist Nepalese man participates in taste evaluations of Malaysian chicken exports to Singapore and beyond.

Yet even these trained kitchen staff struggled to articulate how different meats tasted besides "good" or "like chicken." They did identify tastes of meat in relation: chicken thigh tastes better, breast "healthier." Some also described their tastes for meat relationally: ethnic Chinese I interviewed often claimed they could not tolerate the spicy food of Malays or Indians, which they considered unhealthy; a couple respondents even found it impossible to imagine a vegetarian Malay dish, many ethnic Indians abstaining from meat for religious reasons. Healthy tastes appeared to be evaluations of, not only ethnicity, but modern subjectivities amidst shifts in meat's meanings. Practices around meat and perceptions thereof are taking on new meanings with the introduction of "plant-based meats," purported to be modern, healthy alternatives to their animal-derived analogues. The marketing of plant-based meats

in KL and Singapore reveals how producers and consumers project taste preferences and health statuses according to stereotyped diets. Managers at the KL factory conveyed this most explicitly when recounting how the director summarily decided upon the three flavors for their new plant-based nugget line: satay (for Malays), spicy masala (for Indians), and Hainanese chicken (for Chinese).

As notes from the field, these are all preliminary findings. Many questions remain and will guide my subsequent research when I return to KL and Singapore later this year. Do people in Singapore still taste something different in their chicken sourced along new supply chains? Do other people in Malaysia believe taste stops at the tongue, as the KL factory kitchen staff suggested? (Also see Caldwell [2014] on this question.) To what extent do individuals' chicken consumption and experience thereof conform to ethnic stereotypes? Does any of this vary by class or gender, or between Malaysia and Singapore? And how did a vegetarian Buddhist from Nepal end up tasting chicken all day long at a processed meat factory in KL? I look forward to attempting to answer these questions and raising new ones in the process. For now, what seems clear is how the chicken ban demonstrated tastes of and for meat as national security concerns for both Malaysia and Singapore, where local reactions reflected the countries' different locations within transnational food systems. These tastes reveal cultural associations with particular cuts and preparations of chicken that may manifest, not only in discourses around health, but through patterns of sensory experience.

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Biographical Note

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Obituary: Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof (1939-2022)

A Humble Tribute to A Gargantuan Figure in the Malaysian Academia by Cheryl Chelliah Thiruchelvam

Picture 1. The author with Prof. Ghulam-Sarwar Yuosof in Bengaluru in 2017.

I first met the late Prof. Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof at REVA University in Bengaluru in 2017. Ironically, despite the fact that we both are from Malaysia, I had never contacted this well-known researcher in the area of *mak yong* and *wayang kulit* before that. As I had embarked on my PhD studies on Ramayana in the visual arts, the name 'Ghulam-Sarwar Yousof' was not uncommon within the scope of my research. My reluctance to contact him was due more to my

presumption—which proved to be wrong in the following years when I got to know him as a humble, knowledgeable, funny and always willing to assist academic. Although I was a little afraid of his reputation and felt that perhaps my research topic was inferior, I had sought Prof. Ghulam's view and thought after presenting my paper in that conference. I wanted to know if that topic was valid and relevant in the Malaysian context. Prof. Ghulam gave a nod, and perhaps this gave me a little more confidence and encouragement in my research. His easy going, approachable nature, interest in academic engagement and ever willingness to help students (regardless of whether they were his supervisee or not) was something I found admirable and yet to a certain extent, rare within Malaysian academia.

I suppose it was these qualities that in a way forged my humble friendship/tutelage with Prof. Ghulam over the years. I must highlight here that Prof. Ghulam was neither my supervisor nor my external examiner for my thesis. But during the course of my research, I had contacted him several times to clarify my doubts pertaining to the topic of Ramayana. It was also because of him that I was able to go to Kelantan to watch a live *wayang kulit* performance in 2018. Throughout these years, although he was busy with his academic responsibilities at University Malaya, he was also active with his own research. Despite his age, he was still busy flying abroad for research, conferences, etc. I remember him mentioning about going to Bangkok to look at some archives at SEAMEO SPAFA perhaps back in 2018/19, and recently he was even invited as a speaker in one of the conferences in India.

After Bengaluru, I met him a few other times in Kuala Lumpur—at a conference, talk, and casual meetings at his office. When we exchanged notes on our updates and works in-progress, Prof. Ghulam was always busy with writings—poetry, books, memoir. When asked how he managed to get all these writings done despite his busy schedule, Prof. Ghulam had mentioned that he used whatever free time he had, whether if it was four in the morning or even late at night, and he worked on several different writings at the same time! I told Prof. in a friendly gesture that I hoped some of his writing skills and enthusiasm will be passed on to me. Since MCO, Prof. had been working on a volume of his academic writings and projects. Besides that, he had also mentioned to me about a documented series worth of 30 hours of recording that was supposed to be published on YouTube. In the recent months he had dedicated his time to editing and fine-tuning these recordings—something I was looking forward to. And in between all these, he was shifting his home from KL to Penang, and setting up a research center in Penang.

Prof. Ghulam had kept himself busy all these years, despite his age or even when he broke his wrist (if I remember correctly). Even during the lockdown, he had immersed himself in research to beat the boredom. Another project that Prof. was involved with was the Global Encyclopedia of Ramayana initiated by the Ayodhya Research Institute in India. Prof. Ghulam was to head and supervise the academics/researchers from Malaysia and Singapore for this project. As the director of this institute had passed on due to COVID last year, this project is in hiatus. It is no doubt that Prof. Ghulam was a prominent researcher and academic in Malaysia and

Southeast Asia in the area of *wayang kulit* as well as other traditional performing arts such as *mak yong*. He seems to be the go-to person when it comes to traditional performing arts and a walking and talking dictionary on this! In a conversation with Prof. Ghulam on his initial days at USM, he explained that he was asked by the then Vice Chancellor, Hamzah Sendut to join USM which was known as University of Penang in 1971 to set up the performing arts programme. Prof. Ghulam was also given the Academic Staff Training Scheme (ASTS) Fellowship by the University of Penang and further pursued his tertiary education at with the East-West Centre, University of Hawai'i. Upon completing his Masters and PhD after five years, he would then return to serve USM, and Universiti Malaya after that.

His huge contribution to the academic world and students is too broad to be listed down. My short writing here does not do justice to it but it has been a nibbling thought to me to write a short tribute. When I received the news of his demise in November, I was in shocked and in disbelief. I had just texted him to share the news that I was one of the grant recipients which he was my referral few days prior. In our short and brief communication, he did mention he could not find people to set up his research center in Penang. Prof. was so determined and enthusiastic I suppose about this research center as I recall him mentioning about his vast collection of books, puppets and other materials that he would like to put into good use over the years during our meetings. My only regret is that I never got to meet him in Penang and I take full responsibility for my selfishness here. Upon completion of my thesis last year, I had posted a hard bound copy to Prof. which he had read and commented on it. He had mentioned that we could discuss it when we met up—which is too late now. The week before his passing I was texting a friend in Penang, saying that I would like to come and stay a night in Penang—thinking I could visit Prof. and spend some time with my friend. This is indeed a harsh reminder to myself that time and tide waits for no man.

Thanks for all your guidance and assistance Prof! May your visions, writings, research center and documented series come into fruition. It is still hard for me to believe that he is no longer with us, but in my own imagination, I see Prof. having conversation with other *wayang* characters in the mystical realm—and this is not intended to upset or offend any individual or party.

Biographical Note

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Book Review

Life After: Oral Histories of the May 13 Incident

May 13 Oral History Group
(Petaling Jaya: Gerakbudaya Publishers, 2022)

Review by Sharifah Munirah Alatas, Ph.D.
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The Neglect of Oral History and Memory Studies in Malaysia

Both oral history and memory studies involve learning about the lives of ordinary people through long, open-ended interviews. As a method of inquiry, it often links the notion of democracy and collective civil rights, to the injustices of wilfully forgetting the past through active manipulation of historical events. Political elites have been known to manipulate history, to project a more state-centric, elite-manufactured narrative for societal consumption.

In the context of the May 13, 1969 riots, the neglect of memory studies and oral history, as well as the prevailing de-classification of official documentation about how and why the incident took place, are part of a subtle "silencing" of the victims' voices. The intention is probably to project only one version—the official one—rather than to record an objective, inclusive and people-centred one. Also, the act of "silencing" invariably suggests an attempt to conceal the truth.

Life After: Oral Histories of the May 13 Incident is a collection of personal narrations and memories of a dark episode of racial violence, in Malaysia's post-independence history. As the sub-title suggests, the book is a compilation of oral histories, narrated by 20 men and women. Nineteen of them are Malaysians of various ethnicities, and one is an Australian lecturer who was based at Universiti Malaya's History department at the time.

The book is co-authored by four young Malaysians who call themselves the May 13 Oral History Group. The group comprises Tham Seen Hau, Usen Leong, Tung Wan Qing and Por Heong

Hong. However, their names do not appear on the front cover. In fact, it is not immediately apparent who the authors of the volume are, until the reader begins to leaf through each of the engaging pages, to reach the small print on the back cover flap.

This in itself symbolises the running message throughout the book. It seems that the intention of these authors from the very beginning is to spotlight the stories of the survivors and honour the victims, rather than to showcase themselves. To do the latter would draw attention away from the victims and survivors. These ordinary Malaysians who were killed in the riots, or who witnessed the unspeakable violence, remain faceless. The survivors have not yet been given a space in society to tell their stories, or to honour their deceased loved ones. They could not tell their stories because these historical events have been trapped within a cloud of secrecy, dictated by our political culture.

There are a few examples of how oral history in Malaysia has been used in various studies, from art, film, and literature, to history and politics. Overall however, establishing an oral history programme in the country has been "sluggish". (Musa, 2018). Nevertheless, there are a few worth mentioning.[1]

In 2019, Lau Kek Huat produced a visual narrative called "The Tree Remembers". This film was banned in Malaysia as it highlighted the origin of racism in Malaysia and the taboo of the 1969 riots. (Lau, 2019). Agnes Khoo's *Life as the River Flows: Women in the Malayan Anti-Colonial Struggle* is an oral history account of sixteen women from Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. It highlights the role that women played in the guerrilla war fought by the Communist Party of Malaya. (Khoo, 2005). In 2020, Tan Teng Phee published *Behind Barbed Wire: Chinese New Villages During the Malayan Emergency, 1948-1960*. He used a combination of ethnography, oral history and archival material to highlight what it was like to be moved to, and to live in, a "New Village" (Tan, 2022). More than a decade ago, the Five Arts Centre[2] attempted to document the oral histories of Malay communists. However, the documentary was never released. Instead, some footage and conversations collected by the group during their fieldtrips to southern Thailand was used for a theatre performance recently. (Tobin, 2019). *Life After* joins this rare and intriguing collection.

A "People's" Narrative to Fill In the Gaps

Since 1969, the government's reluctance to de-classify official documents relating to the riots has resulted in a maze of half-truths and myths, on top of several attempts to reconstruct events based on empirical research.[3] There has been no encouragement from official channels for empirically-based, transparent, and unemotional discussions after the first National Operations Council (NOC) Report was released in October 1969. By default, all ethnic communities in Malaysia who were affected by the riots, have hardly spoken about their painful past.

As a result, we have yet to heal as a society, complicating our efforts to build a cohesive and progressive nation. In the decades after 1969, there is an obvious and automatic reluctance of Malaysians to even casually refer to May 13. This episode is deemed "too sensitive", which is the official narrative imposed on the rest of society. *Life After* however, is an attempt to deviate from this, and offers a "people's narrative".

Diana Wong's Foreword, and K. S. Jomo's Postscript each present a unique interpretation of events leading up to the horrific killings. Their scholarly insight supplements a short list of other publications that have emerged over the decades. Together with the 20 personal narrations, *Life After* vividly exposes how ordinary Malaysians felt about the machinations of politicians and their political parties. Through their stories, the survivors present their thoughts about how elite political agendas influenced violent mobs that resulted in the riots.

The reader is provided with alternative perspectives in simple language about violence, kindness, personal regret, disbelief, and inconsolable suffering. Significantly, none of the stories expresses anger, the need for retribution or revenge. To the contrary, the common thread connecting these 20 narrations is the yearning for acknowledgement of their suffering, and for closure.

The People's Commitment

On the one hand, the stories expose a subtle tension within the survivors themselves. This tension is about whether they should talk about their horrific experiences or not. On the other hand, their narrations allude to how today's politicians continue to manipulate society's perception of ethnicity, which in turn dismisses history, their suffering, hopes, and vulnerabilities as survivors.

One survivor said that one of the biggest influences the incident had on him is a "mistrust of politicians". He related, "it also changed me in being Malaysian to be more humanistic. In times of troubles, the rich people, the powerful people, the influential people, always got advantages. Police come and save them….they came in trucks, carrying their furniture. I cannot accept this…I think that event made me a socialist" (Mr. R, p. 58).

Life After also reveals that sense of regret among the survivors, and about the nature of our politics today. Our politics has bred a culture of concealment, disguise or simply, a "cloaked" culture among Malaysians. This further marginalises the human face of tragedy under any circumstances. May 13 is consistently and unfairly linked *only* to politics. Even though the events were crystallised by political developments, the consequences should move beyond politics. The commitment of the May 13 Oral History Group and Gerakbudaya to publish *Life After* represent the "people's responsibility" to acknowledge humanity, and not just politics.

For example, any mention of the events of May 1969 is usually done as a filler, a passing comment or a warning about a current political or social problem. For example, days after the last general election (November 19, 2022), Malaysian police "cautioned" social media users to refrain from posting "provocative" content on race and religion (Channel News Asia, 2022). May 1969 is regularly mentioned in the context of this faceless, inanimate, and threatening paradigm.

Conflating a Tragedy to "One Noun and One Number"

In the Foreword of the book, Diana Wong writes about the lack of discourse about the violence that took place days after the third general elections of 1969. She accurately suggests that information has been hidden "behind a wall of

silence….the whole country, it would appear, lost its voice to silence". (p. 6). Also, after almost 54 years, what seemed like an endless two-week long series of street violence in several major cities on peninsular Malaysia, is now dismissively referred to as "the May 13 riots" or "May 13". The nation's tragedy has now been conflated to one noun and one number, i.e. "May 13".

May 13 is still shrouded in "official amnesia" because information is scarce and scholarly discourse is meagre. (p. 6). *Life After* is a fresh attempt to counter this. Witnesses and survivors have a space for expression, and their tragedies are no longer "footnoted". Their oral narrations of brutal killings, and of inhaling the stench of headless bodies floating down rivers, is an appeal for humanity and comfort. Their stories are not about blame, retribution or revenge.

This is contrary to the official insistence that speaking about May 13 and our nation's brush with racial violence is too "sensitive" a topic to broach. According to this narrative, any discussion may renew feelings of ethnic hatred, prejudice, and violence.

In *Life After*, both the authors and survivors engage in a collaborative and democratic practice that seeks to make space for as many voices as possible. The purpose is to understand historical events as being inclusive and complex, as well as to highlight the experiences of "the ordinary Malaysian". It is a bottom-up approach to good research, and an excellent literary contribution that bridges difficult socio-political subjects.

It is clear in *Life After* that, for the survivors, their brush with violence and the deaths of their loved ones had more to do with egotistical politics, and less to do with ordinary people hating each other on account of their different ethnicities. According to the majority of the narratives, the violence was not an organic, divisive social dynamic brewing within our multi racial society for years.

Closure, Caution, and "Malaysian-style" Democracy

Had it not been for the May 13 Oral History Group, many of these survivors' stories would remain trapped in their hearts, minds, and souls. Most of these men and women are aging, now in their 70s and 80s. If not for *Life After*, they would have to spend the rest of their lives harbouring their memories in silence and isolation. *Life After* is a humane step towards closure for them.

One survivor recalls: "the May 13 memories were something that I don't really talk about because it was an incident that I wish had never happened. The images of buildings burning, headless bodies……it was something that should not have happened". (Mr. B, page 70). Many survivors do not talk because of how contemporary Malaysian politics has evolved.

Malaysian-style democracy is premised on an elite-led politicisation of socio-cultural diversity in our society. Politics has evolved in such a way that politicians have devised ingenious ways of garnering electoral support through their use ethnic and religious narratives. This happens during every election cycle. Political posturing is channelled through "divide-and-conquer" narratives played up by many mainstream media outlets.

Given the experience of ethnic violence in Malaysia's past, today's politicians are cautious. Nevertheless, it is evident from the pages of *Life After* that survivors are frustrated that such "caution" has been taken to the extreme. There is no commitment to have a sincere, mature, and calm national conversation about the riots. There is no attempt to recognise the value of a community-interpreted narrative. There is no realisation that only one official narrative *feels* like an insult to all the victims and survivors.

A few of the survivors in *Life After* hope the government will soon declare an annual Memorial Day for the victims. One survivor related: "My mother feels that a memorial should be erected to commemorate the victims of May 13, at the very least, for some of their names are not found in the cemetery….We need this recognition because all victims' families suffer similar pain, regardless of their backgrounds". (p. 231). A memorial is a gesture of respect and dignity for those who perished, so that we may celebrate their lives and in the process, collectively heal as a nation.

"Ignore It and It Will Go Away" Mantra

The gross lack of attention to the events of May 13 is an example of the "ignore it and it will go away" mantra practiced too often in Malaysian society. Mr. B's statement above is an example. *Life After*, however, is a collection of dignified and mature narrations which do not ignore human suffering. It honours the victims, and situates the role of politics and politicians upfront. In simple language, the stories in this volume inadvertently dismiss the politically-instigated stereotypes about Malaysia's diverse ethnic communities.

In the book, survivor Mr. R relates how he witnessed a Chinese family in their car, being approached by a group of Malays. He said, "I went to stop them. I remember shouting, hysterically…..let them go, kill me, kill me, don't kill them. The Malays were actually surprised why I stopped them….I don't know why I did it. But when I see the two crying kids, and the parents were shivering in the car, I could not accept that. *Apa dosa dia*?[4]....why should they be victims? Just because they were Chinese? (Mr. R, p. 54).

An important message in *Life After* is that society must mature, and learn to prioritise closure in the aftermath of tragedy. Also, we as Malaysians must discard destructive myths around ethnicity and diversity. In the Malaysian context, trepidation *because* of our multi-ethnic society is an imagined (false) reality of shrewd politicians. It is not the reality of the people.

On January 7 2023, the publishers Gerakbudaya held a panel discussion, followed by the launch of the book. The event was well-attended. Visit https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2023/01/08/with-documentation-of-oral-history-kin-of-may-13-survivors-and-academics-call-for-closure/48991).

Endnotes

[1] I would like to thank Por Heong Hong for providing me with this information.

[2] The Five Arts Centre is a collective of Malaysian artists, activists, and producers, dedicated to generating alternative art forms and images in the contemporary arts landscape. "A Notional History" featured Mark Teh (Director), Wong Tay Sy (Production Design), Fahmi Reza, Rahmah Pauzi, Faiq Syazwan Kuhiri (Performers), Syamsul Azhar (Lighting and Media Design), June Tan (Translation and

Subtitling Production), and Alison Khor (Stage Manager).

[3] Kua Kia Soong's May 13: Declassified Documents on the Malaysian Riots of 1969 (2007) relied predominantly on contemporary media accounts and diplomatic dispatches. The author tried to piece together events that led up to the violence, suggesting a pre-planned political coup. Soong's take is controversial but nevertheless highlights an important point. The different ethnic communities in Malaysia will forever be bombarded by biased ethnic and religious politicking, unless the government declassifies documents.

[4] What wrong did they do?

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Conference Announcement

Who are you, Malaysia? Representations of Malaysia's Past, Present, and Future after 60 Years of Nationhood

Date: 7-8 July 2023
Location: New Era University College, Kajang, Malaysia
Convenor: Dr Jason Ng Sze Chieh, New Era University College
Co-hosted by New Era University College

31 August 1957 saw the birth of the Federation of Malaya. The transformation from the Federation of Malaya to the Federation of Malaysia on 16 September 1963 by incorporating Singapore, Sabah, and Sarawak was historically and politically significant as it is a unity of disparate principalities and territories with variegated ethnic makeup. Brunei agreed initially to be part of the Federation but declined at the final moment. Malaysia, sans Brunei and Singapore, is seen as a successful experiment in consensus building built on an unwritten social contract that preserves and protects the Bumiputera community's culture and religion but with guaranteed rights and prosperity for non-Bumiputera communities such as the Chinese and Indians.

This social contract was initially seen as a necessary arrangement to provide the basis for creating a Bangsa Malaysia. Various approaches, particularly affirmative action, were introduced to move Malaysia from a plural and unequal society toward a multicultural and egalitarian society by levelling economic disparities between races and regions. However, the social

contract appears to have become the entrenched doctrine that defines Malaysia through the long-ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) regime and since 2018 by four different coalitions.

Socially, the Malaysian demography has seen major shifts, with the Bumiputera (69%), Muslims (64%) and the Malay population (63%) now becoming a significant majority, according to the Department of Statistics Malaysia.1 This has led to significant political outcomes, with indigenous minorities in Sabah and Sarawak and the ethnic minorities of Peninsular Malaysia finding themselves gradually disenfranchised in many spheres of public life while gaining traction in other areas.

Malaysia was envisioned as a nation that would traverse a multicultural path with all indigenous and ethnic groups contributing to nation-building and shared prosperity. Nonetheless, Malay ethnonationalism championed by UMNO (United Malays National Organization) and religious-ethnonationalism promoted by PAS (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia) appears to have become the driving force governing Malaysia six decades later, as demonstrated by the recent general election. Many would point to the 13 May 1969 incident as a catalyst for this significant shift, while others may point to other factors, and some may even disagree.

There are pointed arguments that Malaysia is no longer the champion of a particular form of multiculturalism, with the social contract firmly enshrined, as outlined by its founding fathers, let alone the creation of Mahathir's Wawasan 2020 and Bangsa Malaysia dream. Instead, it is increasingly losing the lustre of even a plural society. It is slowly but surely moving into an era of ethnocentrism and Islamisation centred around Malay-Muslim dominance.

We might ask whether this slide towards singular ethnic-religious dominance in all aspects of Malaysian public life is a foregone conclusion? Does the argument that might is right, or does majoritarian politics sway? How much does the nation's history of achieving independence collectively still influence the Malaysian identity?

More importantly, with Barisan Nasional's political power fracturing since the unexpected Pakatan Harapan victory in the 14th General Elections, the success of Pakatan Harapan and Perikatan Nasional at GE15, which path should Malaysia take at 60 years old?

Although there is an apparent resistance against extreme ethno-religious-nationalist policies by all ethnic groups, which is demonstrated by the success of Pakatan Harapan and the subsequent formation of a national unity government at the insistence of the Malay Rulers, there is also an equally powerful desire to transform Malaysia into a Malay-Muslim-only-led nation-state, of which PAS's desire to create some form of an Islamic state is merely the most overt and persistent manifestation.

After six decades of nationhood, Malaysia and Malaysians still struggle to define themselves in this fast-evolving post-colonial world. As the world is embroiled in a new East-West political and economic tug-of-war echoing the dark days of the Cold War, Malaysia faces a drastic realignment that threatens the established global order. Covid-19, floods, the China-US tussle, and the war in Ukraine are only tips of the

iceberg that expose the nation's social and political fissures and weaknesses.

The MASSA symposium of 2023 will examine Malaysia's 60th year of founding within national, regional, and international contexts. Naturally, we welcome papers that discuss this topic involving disciplines in the social sciences and humanities. All other issues related to Malaysia will also be considered. The symposium this year will be in a hybrid format.

We are also interested in papers and/or panels that provide discourse on critical issues related to Singapore and Brunei (Islamisation, foreign relations between Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei, etc.) that may be relevant to the theme of Malaysia at 60 given the close cultural, political, and historical links of these countries.

The recommended topics are not exhaustive and are organised alphabetically:

- Climate change and the environment
- Culture, religion, and society
- Economy
- Education
- Gender
- Foreign policy, regional and international relations
- Health
- Human rights
- Human capital development
- Labour and migration
- Legal and institutional reforms
- Nation-building and citizenship
- Public sector
- Regime type, coalition building and democratisation
- Multiculturalism and/or plural society
- National security and defence
- Marginalised communities

Paper proposals should include a title, abstract (maximum 500 words), and contact details. Selected papers will be included in a refereed publication.

Paper, panel proposals, and queries about MASSA 2023 should be directed to the Convenor, Dr Jason Ng (massa2023symposium@gmail.com).

Deadline of abstracts: 28 February 2023
Notification of acceptance: 14 March 2023
Deadline for paper submission: 31 May 2023

The Malaysia and Singapore Society of Australia (MASSA) is the first 'country' association to be affiliated with the Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) – shortly after ASAA's formation in 1976. MASSA serves as a focal point for scholarly contact and communication and strives to represent and promote the interests of Malaysia and Singapore studies in Australia, the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

Editorial Information

Berita is the official publication of the Malaysian/Singapore/Brunei (MSB) Studies Group. A part of the Association of Asian Studies, we are a cross-disciplinary network of scholars, students, and observers with research and other professional interests in Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei.

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