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BERITA

Malaysia/Singapore/Brunei Studies Group
Association for Asian Studies



Berita

Malaysia/Singapore/Brunei Studies
Group Association for Asian Studies

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Letter from the Chair

We are again looking forward to a strong line-up of panels and papers with Malaysia, Singapore, or Brunei content at this year's Annual Meeting of the Association of Asian Studies. The virtual meeting will be held on March 1, while the in-person conference will take place in Seattle on March 14-17.

This year, the MSB Studies Group is sponsoring the panel "Race and Racialization in British Southeast Asia". This is one of four panels, one roundtable and 32 papers that have Malaysia, Singapore, or Brunei content as their primary or sole focus. In addition, there are two papers in the virtual session that is on Malaysia. In this issue of *Berita*, we provide all the panel details, chronologically.

This year's annual business meeting of the Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei (MSB) Studies Group will be held on **Saturday, March 16, 2024, from 12:15 p.m. - 1:45 p.m. at Room 602 of the Seattle Convention Center**. We look forward to meeting anyone connected to MSB – remember, you do not have to be a member to attend. During the meeting, we will announce the winners of the Lockard and Lent prizes as well as the Provencher Travel Award. In past years, the MSB has moved forward because of the many helpful suggestions and discussions during the business meeting, so please drop by to reconnect with old friends, make new connections, and offer your thoughts on how to promote scholarship and interest in Brunei, Singapore and Malaysia.

We are not Malaysia, Singapore or Brunei focused if we do not eat or think about eating. As such, we will hold our annual dinner on **Saturday, March 16, 2024, at around 7:45 or 8 pm**. We will post the details later on our Facebook page and mailing list.

Even as I pen this forward, a debate has broken out in Malaysia over proposals to recognize Chinese New

Villages as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In this issue of *Berita*, Por Heong Hong traces an earlier effort to list the Sungai Buloh Leprosy Settlement (SBLS) in the UNESCO World Heritage, how this was situated in the context of earlier efforts in Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea, and how the tenor and tactics of the Malaysian effort differed. Both cases are examples of how cultural and heritage issues run into the political headwinds of each era.

Also in this issue, Dr. Sharifah Munirah Alatas expands on the key themes of her recent book, *Reform and Nation Building: Essay on Socio-political Transformation in Malaysia*. She discusses, in an interview with Chan Xin Ying, why efforts at reform stalled after the May 2018 electoral victory by Pakatan Harapan, the constitutional democracy that is prescribed in Malaysia' constitution and how that is practiced, post 2018, the role feudalism plays in the political sphere, and other related issues.

These and many more other themes will be explored in the upcoming AAS Annual Meeting. The breadth of topics, and the healthy number of papers, panels and roundtables that builds on last year's equally strong smorgasbord (or, hotel high tea buffet) is an encouraging sign for scholarship on Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei.

I look forward to seeing as you all in Seattle.

Best wishes,
Cheong Soon GAN
Chair, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei (MSB) Studies
Group
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MSB-Related Panels and Papers for AAS 2024



MSB-related panels and papers for AAS 2024

Below is a list of panels, papers, and roundtables with Malaysia, Singapore, or Brunei content at the 2024 Annual Meeting of the Association of Asian Studies, over two formats – the virtual meeting on March 1 as well as the in-person meeting on March 14-17. 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. Brunei.

In-person meeting, Seattle, March 14-17, 2024 (Thursday to Sunday)

In Seattle, there will be four panels, one roundtable and 32 papers that have Malaysia, Singapore, or Brunei content as their primary or sole focus, with an additional five panels and nine papers that have significant MSB content. The highlight of Seattle is the MSB Studies Group sponsored panel, 'Race and Racialization in

British Southeast Asia', scheduled for Sunday, March 17, 2024, 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM. The other three MSB-focused panels are:

- 'Race, Diaspora, and Citizenship in Everyday Life in Southeast Asia', Friday, March 15, 2024, 4:00 PM - 5:30 PM
- 'Challenges of Democratic Governance in Malaysia Since 2018', Saturday, March 16, 2024, 4:00 PM - 5:30 PM
- 'Aesthetics of Power in Maritime Southeast Asia: Critical Examinations of the Theatricality of Staleness in Historical and Contemporary Maritime Southeast Asia', Saturday, March 16, 2024, 8:30 AM - 10:00 AM

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

Thursday, March 14, 2024

Panel: A021 - Reconceptualizing Asian Social Trajectories through Transmedial Genres

Time: Thursday, March 14, 2024, 7:00 PM - 8:30 PM

Location: Room 213 (Level 2, Seattle Convention Center)

Paper: "The Film Now Exists, like Many Other Things in Singapore, Only in Hearsay": Daniel Hui's *Snakeskin* and a Cinema of Subterfuge
Presenter: Elizabeth Wijaya, University of Toronto

Paper Abstract:

Of the films that address Singapore's Cold War narratives, Daniel Hui's hybrid speculative fiction documentary, *Snakeskin* (2014), is the most



esoteric and inventive. Shot on 16mm film, *Snakeskin* connects Singapore's nation-building project to its British and Japanese colonial histories, the Malay film industry, and Communist possibilities. By merging the genres of historical documentary, personal documentary and speculative fiction, including voiceover from the perspective of a reincarnated cat who recounts past life memories of the still-contentious 1950s Chinese Middle School Riots, *Snakeskin* stages competing truth claims that underlie the meta-narratives of national, familial and cinematic histories within Singapore. The result is a meta-cinematic, non-realist experimental film, where lo-fi depiction of time travel and reincarnation become tropes from which the palimpsestic histories of Singapore are reclaimed from everyday scenarios such as people taking walks at Fort Canning Park. I consider *Snakeskin's* aesthetics as a "cinema of subterfuge," which allows for secret escapes from constrained conditions of existence. The survival of Cold War memories in *Snakeskin* will be discussed with the film's transformation from analog production to survival as digital, private streaming media. *Snakeskin* has only been shown 5 times in Singapore. It is now out of circulation and not available for purchase. As Daniel Hui says, "Aside from a handful of people who possess the Vimeo link, the film now exists, like many other things in Singapore, only in hearsay." The film which is interested in the limited material existence of suppressed memories in Singapore has itself become a hidden digital existence.

Roundtable: A024 - Temple Tracks: Labour, Piety and Railway Construction in Asia

Time: Thursday, March 14, 2024, 7:00 PM - 8:30 PM

Location: Room 303 (RT) (Level 3, Seattle Convention Center)

Participants:

Sidharthan Maunaguru, National University of Singapore (organizer); Arunima Datta, University of North Texas (chair); Shivani Gupta, National University of Singapore; Noorman Abdullah, National University of Singapore; Vineeta Sinha National University of Singapore; Seng Gua Yeoh, Monash University Malaysia; George Jose, New York University Abu Dhabi (discussants)

Roundtable Abstract:

Organized around a new book on inter-Asia colonial migration, labour histories, religion making in colonial contexts, this roundtable focuses on piety, labour and migration during the colonial times across South Asia and Southeast Asia. The themes come out of Vineeta Sinha's 's Temple Tracks: Labour, Piety and Railway Construction in Asia. This book presents a historical and ethnographic account of railway construction, Indian labour migration and religion making in regions once known as 'Malaya.' These three narratives are approached as entangled threads of the same historical project of colonial industrial-capitalism. Mapping these seemingly disparate strands onto each other and scrutinizing the specific nodes where they interface has confirmed the convoluted intersections and entanglements of



domains marked as ‘sacred/religious’ and ‘profane/secular’. This book presents a textured tale of the complex ties between the practices and processes embedded in notions of labour, mobility and piety – pivots on which the ethnography rests and with which it is analytically intertwined. A fourth hinge – that seemed firmly and inevitably enmeshed with this conceptual triad – was the author’s journey as a researcher charting Hinduism in these territories for almost two decades. A series of intersecting ethnographic and historical journeys anchor this book, which straddles the colonial and postcolonial periods, bringing the discussion up to the present day in Singapore and Malaysia.

This roundtable initiates a conversation among scholars whose work touches on labour, migration, mobility, religion, historical and ethnographic methodologies in contemporary Southeast Asia and South Asia. By doing so the roundtable will discuss at large about how to rethink about the interactions between labour and religions, migration and labour, history and ethnography in the contemporary world.

Panel: A044 - Anthropomorphism and Animal Tropes in Malay Textual and Literary Tradition

Time: Thursday, March 14, 2024, 7:00 PM - 8:30 PM

Location: Redwood B (2nd Floor, Sheraton Grand Seattle)

Panel Abstract:

The representation of animals with human qualities is a common theme in Malay manuscripts and literary tradition. This is often glossed over or condescendingly attributed by Malayologists and Orientalists to the “Malay

trait” of preferring “allusion to plain speaking”, and of their “childlike naiveté” of using animals and plants to evoke feelings and emotions (Overbeck 1934: 109-110). Anthropocentric explanations on the literary substitute of animals and plants for humans may include these – concealment of real human characters in the stories, smokescreen for prohibitive ideas on love, lust and resistance, mystically symbolic, or to have an intertextual confusion of human-non-human identity as literary device would be simply more delightful. Taking off from Nazry Bahrawi’s seminal exploration of anthropomorphism in Malay literature and his notion of the “anthropocentric imaginary” this panel will explore, re-question and decentre such lenses in the production, consumption, moralization and enjoyment of literature with “humanimal” protagonists and animal tropes. Semiotics and new historicism will be used as approach and method. In the lead presentation, Nazry Bahrawi will seek to understand how kinship in the region is imagined through animal trickster stories. In the second presentation, Sher Banu Khan will discuss how animal representations constitute some of the key and symbolic references to power and state formation in the Malay world. This is followed by Maznah Mohamad who will deconstruct how and why two Malay poems use insects and fishes to express the aesthetics of love, sex and longings. Muhammad Suhail will be the panel chair and discussant.

Paper 1:

Underdog Tricksters in Malay-Indonesian Animal Stories

Presenter: Nazry Bahrawi, University of Washington



Paper Abstract:

As we continue to hurtle towards a data-driven economy, studies of societal relations and power dynamics have increasingly taken the form of qualitative and quantitative empirical studies of societies and their members. Less emphasis has been placed on how creative outputs such as folklores and literary texts might provide us insights. This paper seeks to demonstrate how one such material—animal narratives—could offer us novel ways of thinking about kinship in a specific socio-cultural context. To this end, this paper will focus on animal trickster figures that recur in Malay-Indonesian animal narratives across generations. Taking a semiotics approach, it will analyze the sundry meanings attached to the figure of the mousedeer, also known as the *kancil* or *pelandok*, which appears to be the de facto trickster archetype of the Malay Archipelago, in *Hikayat Pelandok Jenaka* (1650). As foils for comparison, it will also consider other similar trickster creatures that came later such as the pig in the 1775 text *Hikayat Raja Babi* (*Chronicles of the Pig King*), the grasshopper in the Malay black-and-white 1959 film *Nجوم Pak Belalang* (*Pak Belalang, the Soothsayer*) as well as the insects in Mohamed Latiff Mohamed's 1980s short story, *Creepy Crawlies*. It seeks to answer the following questions: How has the trickster animal figure evolved over time?

Paper 2: Animal Symbolism in Power and State-Formation in the Malay World

Presenter: Sher Banu AL Khan, National University of Singapore

Paper Abstract:

Animal imagery and narratives have been a prevalent and significant feature in many Malay manuscripts to represent and make meaning about various aspects of human behaviour and social relations. This study aims to explore how animal imagery and tropes in Malay hikayats are used to relate an event of momentous importance for the writer or narrator of the hikayat, i.e. the founding of his kingdom or polity. The *Hikayat Raja Raja Pasai* and the *Sulalat us-Salatin* employ animal symbolism such as the dog, mousedeer and the sacred white cow in their founding narratives. What can these animal imageries and narratives tell us about the various aspects of power, leadership, politics related to the formation and governance of states in the Malay world? How could these symbolic and sacralized animals be interpreted and translated to help us understand the politics and contexts of the time?

Paper 3: The Sexual Poetics of Insects and Fishes in Two Malay Manuscripts on Longing and Passion

Presenter, Panel Organizer and Chair: Maznah Mohamad, National University of Singapore

Paper Abstract:

Two Malay manuscripts is the object of study here – *Syair Bereng-Bereng/Kupu-Kupu* and *Syair Ikan Tembera*. These are tales of lovers – the butterfly (*kupu-kupu*) with the dragonfly (*bereng-bereng*) in one, and the freshwater fish (*tembera*) with the seawater fish (*kakap*) in the other. The romance attests to an inter-species connection, perhaps suggesting a forbidden relationship. How and why do animal protagonists constitute the aesthetics of love,



sex and longings in the Malay world? One reason could be the influence of the mystical dimensions of Islam, with symbolisms of nature and animals associated with the origin of the prophet, particularly in the tradition of Nur Muhammad. Another is the more intimate and close association of humans with their natural world and surrounding ecology then. The representation of animals as humans is not merely allusions but detailed characterizations of some of the many species on earth, reflecting the depth of field knowledge among writers and listeners. Perhaps the interchangeability of the human-animal figure speaks to a world yet to be totally dominated by the Anthropocene.

Panel: A045 - Control and Contention across Civic Spaces in Southeast Asia-Sponsored by AAS Southeast Asia Council

Time: Thursday, March 14, 2024, 7:00 PM - 8:30 PM

Location: Ballard (3rd Floor, Sheraton Grand Seattle)

Paper:

Combating Internalized Westernization: The Paradoxical Nature of Singapore's Anti-Colonial Aesthetics

Presenter: Wee Yang Soh, University of Chicago

Paper Abstract:

Within modern Singapore's sociopolitical discourse, comparisons with Western powers, especially the USA and the UK, have become pervasive, encompassing a wide spectrum of key social issues spanning race and minority rights, state governance, law enforcement, social activism, education, and business and industry.

These comparisons often serve to reinforce the ethical and pragmatic positions held by the Singaporean state, contrasting them against perceived deficiencies of the Western world. Rather than treating Singapore as fundamentally different from the West, this paper is interested in how differences between Singapore and an image of a morally degenerate West are vivified such that they motivate social and moral judgments on a wide range of contemporary sociopolitical issues in Singapore. By employing the linguistic anthropological concept of aesthetic textuality, a concept that considers images as enduring patterns of signs, this paper explores the phenomenon of "anti-colonial aesthetics." It examines how Singaporean actors perceive, represent, and experience the colonial West in everyday life, consequently shaping and justifying a reactionary politics against both the West and fellow Singaporeans who are perceived to have forsaken "Asian values" in favor of Western ones. By shedding light on the ironic influence of contemporary Western conservative media on Singapore's anti-colonial stance, this paper emphasizes the significance of distinguishing between anti-colonialism and the scholarly concept of decolonization—rather than combating Westernization, Singapore's anti-colonial governance paradoxically perpetuates colonial dynamics that assign value to specific groups of people while marginalizing others.

Panel: A049 - Transregional Networks and the Peoples in Southeast Asia: A Historical and Anthropological Approach

Time: Thursday, March 14, 2024, 7:00 PM - 8:30 PM



Location: Capitol Hill (3rd Floor, Sheraton Grand Seattle)

Chair and Discussant: Barbara Watson Andaya, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

Co-panel organizer: Siu-hei Lai, Nanyang Technological University

Panel Abstract:

Southeast Asia has been a pivot of transregional exchanges for centuries. This panel looks beyond the state and examines the central role of the peoples in these exchanges from both historical and contemporary perspectives. Chinese overseas serve as a major case study across the four papers. The panel emphasizes the agency of the peoples, including women, intellectuals, bankers, and educators. The papers also examine the concept of networks in Southeast Asian studies via historical and anthropological approaches. Instead of merely focusing on mobilities, the panel explores both the merits and limitations of using networks as a category of analysis in Southeast Asian studies. With examples from Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and beyond, this panel revisits the region's interactions with the world across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The panel begins with Leong Yee Ting's paper on the socialist "New Women" and the cultural Cold War in 1950s Singapore. The next paper by Allan Pang picks up this ideological perspective and analyses the networks of Chinese intellectuals and history teaching in Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong from the late 1950s to the 1970s. The third paper by Nathanael Lai also draws on the historical context of the Cold War and examines Chinese politics in Singapore, Thailand, and Hong Kong via the lenses of textbook publishers and the

Bank of China. Building on the transregional framework beyond Southeast Asia, the final paper by Siu-hei Lai explores non-state Chinese education of Yunnanese in Northern Thailand and its connections with Taiwan.

Paper 1:

A Socialist Feminist Sisterhood: Birthing the "New Women" and the Chinese Cultural Cold War in 1950s Singapore

Presenter: Yee Ting Leong, National University of Singapore

Paper Abstract:

This paper explores the relationship between gender discourses and political activism against the backdrop of the Chinese cultural Cold War and decolonisation in 1950s Singapore. Through the left-wing newspaper *Sin Pao's* 'New Women' column, this study examines constructions of the socialist "New Woman", which were mediated in conversation with anti-yellow culture rhetoric, Modern Girl discourse, Chinese communism and socialist internationalism. At one time suspected of being captured by the Malayan Communist Party, this *Sin Pao* column reflected shifting loyalties from a dual orientation towards both China and Malaya in the 1940s to a more Malayan-oriented political activism in the 1950s. Its positionality in a British colony where Chinese vernacular education was marginalised cultivated a deep anxiety about cultural identification with China. Women in China—along with other communist countries—also embodied an aspirational ideal for women in Malaya. This paper will argue that gender discourses drew and appropriated from a wide repertoire of international influences, to suit the Malayan context. Yet for all the exhortation for



women to “walk out” of the household into the world, such lofty rhetoric co-existed with recipes and household management tips on the same page. This suggests a palpable gap between theory and reality – the reach of leftist intellectuals’ progressive conceptions of gender may have been limited in reality. Ultimately, this paper aims to not just deconstruct gender ideologies in 1950s Singapore, but to use gender as a lens to re-imagine the history of the left and anti-colonialism in the Chinese cultural Cold War.

Paper 2:

Intellectuals, State Formation, and Historical Narratives in Malaysia and Singapore, 1950s-1970s

Presenter and Panel Organizer: Allan Pang, University of Cambridge

Paper Abstract:

This paper examines the networks of overseas Chinese intellectuals and their attempts at influencing history education in Malaysia and Singapore from the late 1950s to the 1970s. Officials in both territories introduced new curricula for their political needs. Both governments attempted to reshape the meanings of being Chinese. Instead of being a Chinese national, local Chinese had to become part of the postcolonial Malaysian or Singaporean nation. New terminologies conforming to the official lines appeared in curricula, and textbooks could no longer come from other territories, especially Hong Kong, but had to be locally produced. Meanwhile, transnational exchanges of overseas Chinese historians, such as Hsu Yun-Tsiao and Qian Mu, persisted across Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong

Kong. These intellectuals attempted to spread their respective nationalistic ideas of being Chinese yet encountered obstacles. The politics of postcolonial state-building shaped the confusion and contestation of defining Chinese. This paper looks at this process of identity formation and contestation via historical narratives. Even though frequent transregional exchanges took place between these intellectuals and history educators, the former failed to influence lessons across borders. Overall, this paper analyses the historical process of defining ‘Chineseness’ in late colonial and postcolonial Malaysia and Singapore. It examines the struggle of fitting various ideas of being ‘Chinese’ into the curricula. It also explores the changing meanings of being Chinese in the Malay world and investigates Hong Kong’s role in this process of decolonization.

Paper 3:

In Support of the *Zhongzhen*: Loans, Textbooks, and the Cold War in 1950s Southeast Asia and Hong Kong

Presenter: Nathanael Lai, University of Cambridge

Paper Abstract:

This paper examines the tension between the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the Republic of China (ROC) during the early years of their split across the Taiwan Strait – not least how it was developed, advanced, and negotiated in Chinese communities across Southeast Asia and Hong Kong. The paper centres on a loan program rolled out by the Bangkok branch of the Bank of China (BOC), affiliated to the BOC’s Taipei headquarters after the 1949 founding of the PRC split the BOC’s overseas branches into



pro-Beijing and pro-Taipei camps. To strive for loyalties of the so-called overseas Chinese, the Bangkok BOC offered loan credits to Thailand's *zhongzhen* Chinese schools – that is, those considered 'resolutely loyal' to Taipei. One foremost requirement was to adopt ROC-sanctioned textbooks published in Hong Kong instead of allegedly pro-PRC textbooks from Singapore. This program involved and was made possible by individuals and institutions across far-flung places: from a Chinese bank in Bangkok to a Chinese publisher in Hong Kong, from Sino-Thai educators to Taipei's ambassadors, from one bookseller in Singapore to another in Bangkok. Yet it proved to be of little avail amidst evolving sentiments of the Thai public and officialdom towards the Chinese community in the late 1950s. Drawing on sources from Taipei, Bangkok, Hong Kong, and Singapore, the paper argues that the politics of the Cold War connected Chinese communities from across these spaces, but their ties curtailed agendas steeped in the politics of the Cold War in the first place.

Friday, March 15, 2024

Panel: B024 - Sinophone Studies and Local Literary Historiographies: Identity, Mobility, Relationalities

Time: Friday, March 15, 2024, 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM

Location: Room 606 (Level 6, Seattle Convention Center)

Panel Abstract:

A literary history of one's own – such is a hallmark desire of many different Sinophone localities overshadowed by China-centric historical discourses. While different Sinophone spaces are indeed entangled with the eminent modern Chinese canon through diasporic connections and textual circulation, local literatures nevertheless developed out of their respective colonial legacies and settler pasts which also need to be addressed in their specific terms. However, the dogmatically localist position to declare literary independence risks erasing not only actual interactions between the local and the national "homeland" but also horizontal relations in between Sinophone locales. How can local literary historiography "square the circle" of local identity-formation and achieve a "thick" historical description?

This panel seeks to explore what Sinophone studies offers as a methodological dialogue between perspectives from Malaysia, Taiwan, Vietnam, and Hong Kong, exploring how local, translocal, and global dynamics complicate the project of localizing literary history. Cheow-thia Chan examines the formation of Mahua (Malaysian-Chinese) literature as a minor tradition unrecognized as national literature and yet remains globally conscious. Lillian Ngan



zeroes in on a case of Mahua communist writing that curiously suggests Vietnam as an absented participant in the making of Sinophone literature through its vexed relations with Cold War geopolitics. Yu-ting Huang probes the homogenizing effects of Taiwan's institutionalized literary history upon indigenous expressions of their diverse aboriginal lifeworlds. Wayne CF Yeung reviews the extraterritorial developments of post-2019 Hong Kong literature to explore how one local literary history has also been Cantophone perturbations within other Sinophone literary-historical trajectories.

Paper 1:

Going Local: Enacting a Thick Historical Description of the Mahua Literary Space
Presenter: Cheow Thia Chan, National University of Singapore

Paper Abstract:

Contemporary surveys of modern Chinese literature have expanded their geographical scopes, yielding more diverse landscapes of Sinitic literary production. However, inadequate effort has been made to historicize the non-China literary locales that constitute the global pictures. In this regard, Malaysian Chinese (Mahua) literary history raises interesting questions on historiography for minor literature on two fronts. First, what are the broader meanings of grasping Mahua literature as a local formation in global conceptions of modern Chinese literary history, given that it is unrecognized as national literature and has been actively produced by sites beyond the geopolitical territory? Second, global-minded literary histories often foreground texts and events of marginalized locales but omit the

lineages of local cultural thought and polemics that invigorate place-based literary production. What then are the stakes of composing thicker accounts of smaller-scale literary histories? Drawing ideas from his book *Malaysian Crossings*, Chan proposes a revised historiography for a minor tradition like Mahua literature. The approach downplays the customary emphases on nativity and nationality by focusing instead on links between authorial practices and the Southeast Asian country from the 1930s to the 2000s. It also highlights how literary actors on the ground negotiate local self-understandings of their own texts and milieus with extralocal modes of interpretation. Together, the plural venues and temporal trajectory of Mahua literature underscore the value of literary history as a critical lens that considers the inner diversities and entangled connections of literary locales at multiple scales, enriching thereby the biography of a global Chinese literature.

Paper 2:

The Present Absentee: Vietnam in Ng Kim Chew's Malayan Communist Writing
Presenter: Lillian Ngan, University of Southern California

Paper Abstract:

This paper examines how literary studies on Malayan communist writing can be enriched through the exploration of the figure of Vietnam and Vietnameseness. Established in 1930, the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) historically had a strong tie with Vietnam: it was formed by the Vietnamese Nguyen Ai Quoc (better known as Ho Chi Minh), and subsequently led by the Sino-Vietnamese Lai Teck from 1939-1947, who was



also a triple agent worked for the British, French, and Japanese secret services. Divergent from the Vietnamese Communist Party's triumphed history, however, the MCP's failure has influenced Mahua (Chinese Malaysian) writer's alternative fictional and historical writing of the party, which has become an important genre of Mahua literary history. By making the case of Taiwan-based Mahua writer Ng Kim Chew's satirical writing of Lai Teck, this paper argues that the figure of Vietnam and its Vietnameseness occupy a vital role in the transformation of Malayan communist writing within Mahua literary tradition. Unlike previous associations with Chinese revolutionary writing and Taiwan literary history, Ng's fictional portrayal of Lai Teck highlights the intricate and overlooked connection between the MCP and Vietnam, reinstating Vietnam as the present absentee in the evolution of the MCP and its literary writing. It places Vietnam central to the making of Sinophone literature, bridging Sinophone literary communities not only from a geographical standpoint but also through analogous relations. The Vietnam-focused lens thus transcends the notions of language, identity, indigeneity, and diaspora to explore the fluidity and complexity of Sinophone literary expressions.

Panel: B045 - Ecologies of Art and Visual Culture in/of Southeast Asia

Time: Friday, March 15, 2024, 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM

Location: Kirkland (3rd Floor, Sheraton Grand Seattle)

Paper: Examining Singapore's Arts Ecologies: The Probe of Gillman Barracks

Presenter: Ying Zhou, University of Hong Kong

Paper Abstract:

From the establishment of the Singapore Art Museum in 1996 to the National Gallery in 2015, Singapore has accelerated the cultivation of what the National Arts Council (NAC) and the Economic Development Board (EDB) have called its "arts ecology" by constructing spaces to implement the city's aspirations to become a "Global City of Arts." Framed from the perspective of how spatial productions manifest arts ecologies, this talk uses Gillman Barracks to unpack the inherent contradictions of developing an arts ecology, located between global and local, top-down and bottom-up, and space and institution. Its selection and conversion from a set of former colonial-era military barracks into a hub for international galleries by the EDB, NAC and the state developer JTC capitalized on the rapidly growing art market moving East, coinciding with the establishments of the fair Art Stage and the Freeport. The flattening of Bukit Blanda's terrains in the 1970s, where Gillman is situated, and its rebranding as part of a new park system in the late 1990s, also reveals the city state's control of ecological diversity, both artistic and natural. By working with the artists who have taken on the ecologies and geologies that manifest indigeneity, the NTU-Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA) has made Gillman a space shaping the meaning of art for nationhood. What does the 2021 closing of the exhibition space of the CCA, followed by that of the Substation, the city's oldest artist-founded institution, bode for its ecologies?



**Panel: B047 - Looking Beyond the Logos:
Theravada Visual Culture in Southeast Asia**
**Time: Friday, March 15, 2024, 9:00 AM - 10:30
AM**
**Location: Leschi (3rd Floor, Sheraton Grand
Seattle)**

**Paper: Home Is Where One Starts: Nostalgia
and Wisdom in Tsai Ming-Liang's Walking on
Water**
**Presenter: Teng-Kuan Ng, Singapore
Management University**

Paper Abstract:

This paper explores the ways that Tsai Ming-liang's *Walking on Water* (2013) – a short film depicting a monk performing slow walking meditation in an old housing compound in Kuching, Sarawak – instantiates Buddhist modes of wisdom in Southeast Asian and diasporic Chinese contexts. In its production, text, and reception, the film exemplifies what I call “wisdom cinema,” that is, the cultivation, visualization, and diffusion of Buddhist-inflected wisdom via film and its related media practices. I begin with a brief sketch of the Malaysian-Taiwanese auteur's religious biography, highlighting the porous relationship between his personal Buddhist devotion and his filmmaking. Locating the film within Tsai's ongoing Walker omnibus (2012-), I argue that the religion gave him an idiom to rearticulate his longstanding artistic radicalism and nascent cinematic self-reflexivity in the late 2000's. Next, observing how *Walking on Water* fosters critical and imaginative shifts in viewerly perspective, I show how it adapts and blends Theravada and Mahayana traditions of meditation to re-present the reality of impermanence. In contrast to

ascetic and monastic approaches that prioritize the renunciation of desire, the film adopts a playful, sensuous, and altogether affective engagement with nostalgia. Finally, comparing the film's popular reception with the criticism received by other Walker films, I consider the ways that it participates in a transnational genre community of Buddhist-inspired wisdom. Rather than betokening ignorance or suffering, for Tsai and his viewers alike, nostalgic desire instead kindles insight into – and invites a serene homecoming to – the conditions of embodied existence.

**Panel: C026 - South-South Cooperation:
Lessons Learned for Peacebuilding in Asia**
**Time: Friday, March 15, 2024, 11:00 AM - 12:30
PM**
**Location: Room 607 (Level 6, Seattle
Convention Center)**

**Paper: The Roles of Indonesia and Malaysia in
the Peace Building Process in Muslim
Mindanao**
**Presenter: Francisco Magno, De La Salle
University**

Paper Abstract:

This study considers how Indonesia and Malaysia engaged in peace-building diplomacy in Muslim Mindanao, Philippines. This represents a breakthrough in conflict resolution through the active participation of countries in the global South as third parties. Armengol (2013) examined the principles of mediation and the important role of third parties in peace processes. On the other hand, Fisas (2013) listed the stages of the peace negotiation, namely the exploratory phase, preliminary agreement, pre-



negotiation agreement, framework agreement and roadmap, protocols, general agreement, and implementation agreement. Using the analytical categories provided by Armengol and Fisas, the research recognizes the important contributions of Indonesia and Malaysia as third parties in the different phases of the peace process in Muslim Mindanao.

Indonesia hosted peace talks between the Philippine government and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) within the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) framework from 1992 to 1996 paving the way for the establishment of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). However, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) which broke away from the MNLF continued with the armed struggle. It was the turn of Malaysia to serve as third party facilitator starting in 2001. A peace agreement was signed between the Philippine government and the MILF in 2014. As part of the peace process, the Bangsamoro Organic Law was passed in 2018 that replaced the ARMM with the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao

Panel: C033 - Social Imaginaries within Tradition and Beyond

Time: Friday, March 15, 2024, 11:00 AM - 12:30 PM

Location: Room 213 (Level 2, Seattle Convention Center)

Paper: Rethinking “Re-Sinicization” in Malaysia: Examples from the Peranakan Baba-Nyonya in Melaka and Cina Kampung in Kelantan Communities

Presenter: Andrew Loo Hong Chuang, Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman

Paper Abstract:

On 6 March 2023, devotees from Hian Tian Temple in Kampung Pasir Panji Tanah Merah, Kelantan, completed another cycle of the Ong Chun (Wangkang) Festival by ceremoniously setting a Royal Barge ablaze, symbolizing potent ritualistic purification. This tradition, developed in China’s Minnan region between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries and recently recognized as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2020, is carried forward by an ethnic Chinese community primarily speaking Kelantan Hokkien, a creole language that incorporates Hokkien Chinese, Southern Thai, and Kelantan Malay. In Tengker Melaka, the great-grandchildren of Ong Poh Lan, a Fujian migrant who left his ancestral village in 1892 at the age of eight, grew up in a Sino-Palladian Malay house. Predominantly speaking Baba Malay—a hybrid language primarily based on Malay but with loanwords and linguistic features from Hokkien Chinese, this family has adapted to living in an ancient Greek and Roman classical architecture influenced stilt house completed in 1930 unlike other Melakan Peranakan Chinese who lived in shophouses. The rise of China as a prominent global power is said to have resulted in new waves of “re-Sinicization” among ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia, with the Peranakan Chinese being no exception because the heritagization of their once suppressed cultural and religious practices is now interpreted as continuous connections to China. Exploring the lived experiences and social imaginaries of these unique Chinese communities in Malaysia, the paper calls for the inclusion of indigenization and



local knowledge in the discussion of “re-Sinicization.”

Panel: D018 - Classification of Overseas Chinese: Negotiating the Legal, Social, and Political Status of Chinese Diaspora Communities from the Late Qing to the Cold War

Time: Friday, March 15, 2024, 2:00 PM - 3:30 PM

Location: Medina (3rd Floor, Sheraton Grand Seattle)

Paper: Children of Shifting Soil: Inter-Ethnic Adoption and the Category of “Malay”

Presenter: Sudarshana Chanda, Harvard University

Paper Abstract:

In the socially variegated landscape of British Malaya [1826-1957] the classification of colonized peoples, a key feature of British imperial administration, into ethno-racial categories of “Malay,” “Chinese,” “Indian,” and “Other” rendered invisible the many intimate relationships and communities that flourished across racial and religious lines. But intimacies such as inter-ethnic adoption constantly challenged ethno-racial categories and pushed at what it meant to be “Malay.” Being legally Malay had (and continues to have) real stakes: since the early twentieth-century days of British rule, the Malay Reservations Enactment, a colonial era policy, has entitled Malays to valuable tracts of land unavailable to other ethnicities. For just as long, adoptive relationships have been deployed to lodge claims over this soil. This paper is a microhistory of a legal case from 1948 involving interethnic

adoption wherein an ethnic Chinese adoptee’s claim to the category of “Malay” and thereby to land reserved for Malays is contested by family, local elites, and colonial officials. It reveals how individuals in British Malaya, established multilayered modes of belonging to navigate land ownership in the colonial system and its successor, through socially inscribed familial bonds. It sheds light on the structure of the Federation and how the tripartite legal systems of sharia, colonial civil law, and adat (customary law) determined very different outcomes of similar issues, and finally, how the category of “Malay,” was stretched, shrunk, and stretched yet again to determine the fortunes of those at the margins – those who crossed colonial boundaries of race and religion.

Panel: D020 - Inter-Asia Intermediality: The Transboundary Production of Global Asian Mediascapes

Time: Friday, March 15, 2024, 2:00 PM - 3:30 PM

Location: Columbia (4th Floor - Union St., Sheraton Grand Seattle)

Paper: Intertidal Zones: Transmedial Art within and without Singapore

Presenter: Joanne Leow, Simon Fraser University

Paper Abstract:

What kinds of transmedial art and writing are necessary and urgent to archive, critique, and respond to the intertidal zone? By focusing on the mutable coastlines of Singapore and its archipelagic contexts of Malaysia and Indonesia, I consider the rich potential of these human/nonhuman contact zones in this time of



climate catastrophe. The intertidal zones are the spaces between the high tide and the low tide, places most likely to be altered by waterfront infrastructure and haunted by histories of displacement and dispossession. Here there is a heightened awareness of the inequities and histories of colonial and capitalist violence done to communities of humans and nonhumans. From beaches to ports, harbours to wetlands, and dykes to swamps, intertidal zones are defined by flux, ecological complexity, human and nonhuman desire, infrastructure, visible and invisible environmental devastation, teeming life, and spectral traces. Singapore's larger archipelagic context shares the common histories of imperialism, development, land reclamation, and dispossession.

By focusing on art, writing, and performance in and around these zones, I seek to develop new ways of theorizing transmedial art and literary non-fiction as critical/creative lenses and methodologies to reckon with loss, displacement, "progress," and extraction in the intertidal zone. How are notions of urban ecology and nature in flux due to these developments? How do site-specific poetry, fiction, art, and other forms of cultural expression offer us alternate, multidisciplinary ways of inhabiting and contesting these spaces? What forms of nonhuman life persist here despite human expansion?

Panel: E040 - Race, Diaspora, and Citizenship in Everyday Life in Southeast Asia

Time: Friday, March 15, 2024, 4:00 PM - 5:30 PM

Location: Room 307 (Level 3, Seattle Convention Center)

Discussant: Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, University of Southern California

Panel Abstract:

This panel explores questions of race, diaspora and citizenship in everyday life in postcolonial and contemporary Southeast Asia. Seminal scholarship on race and other categories of difference in postcolonial Southeast Asian plural societies (Furnivall 1956) has mainly focused on policy such as cultural assimilation or multiculturalism (Goh 2009, Hefner 2001) as well as on extraordinary forms of violence (Aljunied 2009, Siegel 1993) like racial, ethnic and religious riots. We are interested in questions of everyday life (Low 2016), living within/against state policies and more everyday forms of violence, and sociality (Kathiravelu 2013), civility (Thiranagama 2018), and intimacy in everyday spaces in order to examine the lived realities of race, citizenship and diaspora in contemporary and postcolonial Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Each of our papers theorizes the everyday from different angles. Cherian and Guan examine the everyday spaces of housing in Singapore, with Cherian examining the workings of race and sociality in communal spaces, and Guan examining the rhythms of labor and rest among migrants in domestic settings. Wang's paper examines the emergence of clock time as an everyday form of discipline in the evolution of Christian indigeneity in Borneo, while Yong Tienxhi takes a longer historical frame to examine how civilizational discourses are enfolded into everyday forms of cultural



chauvinism. Our papers speak to the ongoing conversations in critical ethnic/race studies from decolonial/South-South perspectives, as well as in the disciplines of Anthropology, Sociology, History, Urban Studies and Gender and Sexuality Studies.

Paper 1: Landlords, Tenants, Workers: Migration, Racialization, and Citizenship in Singapore's State-Constructed Housing
Presenter, Chair and Co-panel organizer: Xinyu Guan, Cornell University

Paper Abstract:

My presentation explores the complex interplay between race and citizenship as forms of hierarchy and bordering (de Genova 2016) in the everyday spaces of state-constructed housing in Singapore. Eighty percent of Singapore's population lives in Housing Development Board (HDB) apartments. The right to purchase an HDB apartment, however, is restricted to Singapore citizens and permanent residents (PRs), and newer migrants often rent from citizens and PR homeowners. I illustrate ethnographically these everyday rental situations, and in the everyday social spaces of the HDB neighborhoods, such as food courts and that depend on the labor of migrants. While the power differentials between landlords and tenants are often racialized, the difference in citizenship plays a huge role in shaping these interactions and self-understandings. Migrants and non-migrants in Singapore often share similar ethnic backgrounds (Kathiravelu 2020; Ang 2022), differing primarily by their citizenship status, and consequently the terms under which they labor and access housing. I heed Kipnis' (2004) call to theorize citizenship as an independent axis of

power that is intertwined with, but not reducible to, a problematic of racialization. I discuss how HDB housing provides a site for people in Singapore to reflect on their ambivalences about Singapore citizenship, in ways that are intertwined with, but which also goes beyond, racializing discourses.

Paper 2: Under the Block: Indian Singaporeans and the Right to Conviviality in the City
Presenter and Co-panel organizer: Alisha Elizabeth Cherian, Stanford University

Paper Abstract:

This paper explores how Indian Singaporeans enacted a right to conviviality (Gilroy 2004) in public urban space as a right to the city (Simone 2005) against racialized state policing and surveillance. Drawing from two and a half years of ethnographic fieldwork in Singapore, particularly participant observation and in-depth interviews, this paper examines the 'void deck', or the open ground floor space of most Singaporean public housing estates, as a temporary yet sticky Indian social space. By considering the social, political, and phenomenological dimensions of Indian Singaporeans 'hanging out' 'under the block', this paper aims to gain a deeper understanding of the relationships between race, public urban space, and the right to the city.

Public housing is a major site through which the Singapore state accomplishes racial integration, where every housing estate replicates national demographics through racial quotas. The shared domestic-cum-public spaces of these housing estates, such as the corridors, the elevators, and these void decks, are spaces designed as



formally interracial. However, fieldwork in these spaces revealed that residents' and denizens' tactics (deCerteau 1980) as they inhabited these spaces complicated neat official narratives of racial integration and racial harmony. This paper examines questions about informal self-crafted sociality and cultural intimacy (Herzfield 2004), building on scholarship that accesses feelings of comfort and discomfort and modes of inclusion, exclusion, and subject formation through the sensorial (Hakins 2013, Kapoor 2021) and the ludic (Menoret 2014, Merabet 2014).

Paper 3: Theorizing Han Chinese Racism in Malaysia: The Racialized Social System Approach

Presenter: Jonathan Yong Tienxhi, University of Cambridge

Paper Abstract:

The theorization of racism has been dominated by frameworks drawn from Western contexts, focusing on White racism against Black populations. In response to the need for a theorization of racism which takes into account its plural manifestations across the globe, as well as Chen Kuan-hsing's (2010) call for scholars to engage with the issue of 'racism in the Han-centric worldview', this paper theorizes the functioning of Han Chinese racism in Malaysia. The Chinese in Malaysia exist as a minority group within a country where they have been marginalized by Malay political parties, and excluded from the benefits of affirmative action policies in favor of 'indigenous' populations. Theorizing Han Chinese racism in this context requires conceptualizing racism as a phenomenon which can be perpetuated by a

minoritized group which is itself the target of racialized violence.

This paper argues that the racialized social system offers a framework for theorizing Han Chinese racism in Malaysia. This posits that Malay and Chinese Malaysians engage in racial contestation based on social and material rewards along ethnic lines, and racial ideologies are utilized to rationalize, justify or contest the distribution of these rewards. Drawing from interviews conducted with middle-class Malaysian Chinese, I argue that the racial ideology of Han Chinese cultural and civilizational superiority is developed as a defense mechanism in response to the threat of Malay supremacy and encroaching Islamic fundamentalism. This racial discourse is then utilized to justify racism against non-Chinese Others and preserve the material interests of Malaysian Chinese elites.

Paper 4: Rubber Hours: Time, Labor, and Indigeneity in 20th Century Christianization of Borneo

Presenter: Lezhi Wang, National University of Singapore

Paper Abstract:

Observing indigenous festivities in Malaysian Borneo in the 1990s, anthropologist John Postill noticed the erosion of traditional "jam karet", or "rubber-like hours", by what Postill terms "Clock-Calendar Time" (Postill, 2002). In an Andersonian analysis, he attributes the changing temporal paradigms to post-independence political elites' nation-building deliberations. Unsatisfied, I am tracing historical agents further aback. Without the concerted effects of



Christian missions and the latex market boom of early 20th century, the words “rubber” and “hours” would not have gained their cultural meanings. Long before nation state, the Church and the plantation had sown seeds for a slow but impactful conversion of rural Borneo’s everyday temporality. What Postill laments as the loss of an essential indigenous culture reflects the malleability of indigeneity in reality.

Economist Abhijit Banerjee argues that stable wage labor has innate lucrateness to peoples previously unexposed to it (Banerjee, 2011). This generalization holds true in Borneo and was used to much effect by colonial missionaries to convert indigenous folks. With motivations not only to proselytize but also to modernize and develop, the missionary stations actively introduced rubber cultivation and process technologies. Faster pace of the tapping schedule than traditional swidden agriculture soon paved way for the system of weekdays and weekends. Incentives like free accommodation and board also allowed school semesters and seminary terms to tear indigenous children away from farming routines. By looking at previously unused missionary paper trails, I will interrogate how indigenous and colonial interests together produced Borneo’s everyday “jam karet” in the 20th century.

**Panel: E044 - Towards a Public Southeast Asian Studies: Epistemologies and Experiences-
Sponsored by JSEAS-SEAC**

Time: Friday, March 15, 2024, 4:00 PM - 5:30 PM

Location: Room 614 (Level 6, Seattle Convention Center)

Panel Abstract:

The impulse to connect academic research to practices and applications beyond the academe has a long history. Since at least the mid-1990s, scholars began to raise questions about the uncomfortable legacies associated with the origins of North American area-studies, reminding us of Cold War policy needs that partly inspired the funding streams and development of an Asian Studies knowledge production infrastructure. Postcolonial interventions took the history of these epistemological connections further back, linking colonial administrative agendas and contexts to intellectual heuristics that continue to shape how we think about Asia. While acknowledging that these epistemological entanglements have coincided with generational efforts to uncover voices, spaces, and communities that have been marginalized by these dominant structures, institutional and intellectual barriers remain over what constitutes domain expertise, knowledge authority, and normative methods we use to verify/authenticate what we constitute as falling within/without Southeast Asian Studies.

Drawing from parallel discussions in the interdisciplinary fields of Public History, Public Anthropology, Public Social Sciences and Public Humanities, this panel considers the possibility of a “Public Southeast Asian Studies” as an epistemological space, method, and calling that accommodates the forms of knowledge produced by and for Southeast Asian publics. Individually, the papers examine techno-bureaucrats, heritage personnel, funerary stakeholders, activists, and civil servants working in the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore and



Myanmar to highlight the different actors, institutions, and settings within which Southeast Asian knowledge and practices are produced; offering a framework that bridges the intellectual and applicative boundaries between academic and non-academic knowledge about Asia.

Paper 2: Public Death Literacy and Arts Approaches to Death in Singapore
Presenter: Jill Tan, Yale University

Paper Abstract:

The subjects of end of life, death, and grief have been increasingly taken up in the community arts and public-facing death literacy projects in Singapore since the 2010s. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork comprising attendance and volunteering in community arts projects between 2018 and 2022, and work with funeral corporations' public outreach efforts, this paper explores the cultural production of understandings of death and dying through arts approaches by Singaporean practitioners and organizations. I draw on theorizations of community art and socially engaged art produced by scholars, theorists, and artists from Southeast Asia. Community art approaches to remembrance, end-of-life conversations discussed in this paper include the ArtsWok Collaborative and Drama Box's long-running community arts project *Both Sides, Now*, which has been particularly noted for its civic engagement in addressing taboo topics around death and dying. This paper then explores heterogeneous ways in which stakeholders from various sectors—public and private, corporate and creative—approach the multiplicity of death as personal, social, culturally mediated and

universal phenomena. I conclude with a proposal for what art-based research design can lend to humanistic and social scientific studies on death.

Paper 4: The Role of Government-Sponsored Agencies and Institutions in Public History in Southeast Asia: The Case of Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre (ISEAS-Yusof-Ishak Institute, Singapore)
Presenter: Derek Heng, Northern Arizona University

Paper Abstract:

Public history, in the West, has had a legacy of recapturing historical memories and rendering them accessible to the general audience as a means of decentering ownership and intellectual prerogatives over historical narratives of communities. These efforts have been driven from the ground up, as an alternative to state or institution agendas and sponsorship.

In Southeast Asia, public history has taken on a different approach. With decolonization and regional geo-politics driving societal agendas, state-sponsored institutions have been a critical force in shaping the nature of public history discourse and practice across the region. While the objectives of public history in the region have remained largely synchronous to those developed in the West, there is often a strong element of institutional spearheading in the organizational aspects of such efforts.

Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre, a research centre in Singapore fully-funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was critical in spearheading public history projects across Southeast Asia in the 2000s through 2010s. It provided the organizational structure and leveraged upon its



support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to enable collaborations across ASEAN to spearhead projects focused on pre-modern Southeast Asian history. This paper will explore the vertical and horizontal networks, the types of projects undertaken, and the means by which the historical narratives were disseminated. It will also explore the premise for undertaking a public history mandate as a government-funded centre, and the inherent contradictions it had to manage.

Saturday, March 16, 2024

Panel: F040 - Politics, Resistance, and (Im)mobility

Time: Saturday, March 16, 2024, 8:30 AM - 10:00 AM

Location: Room 607 (Level 6, Seattle Convention Center)

Paper: Migrant Lifeworlds and Bracketed Belonging: Gurkha Warriors and Transnational Lives

Presenter: Kelvin E.Y. Low, National University of Singapore

Paper Abstract:

The Gurkhas - whose history of migration and movement from Nepal to Southeast-, East Asia and other regions date back to British colonialism - have established themselves in former British colonies. They were first recruited by the British Army in the middle of the Anglo-Nepalese War of 1814-16. From thereon, they have worked and resided not only in the countries for which they serve in the armed forces (UK, Hong Kong, India, Brunei, Malaya) or police force (Singapore), but also in other contexts where they have retired or embarked on a second career overseas. Gurkhas' migrant lifeworlds and aspirations as a Nepali diasporic community, however, have seldom been addressed in the wider scholarly literature, notwithstanding some exceptions. The military as an institution has often been neglected in accounting for how and why people – such as the British Gurkha soldiers – relocate to foreign lands and form a wider Nepali diaspora. Studying the Gurkhas and their varied mobilities raises different perspectives with which to rethink



belonging as liminal and time-bound with tenure limits. These are crafted in relation to the specificities of military structures that conjugate with the immigration policies of nation-states. Such points of engagement crucially pique renewed conceptualizations of how social actors approach, experience and negotiate migration and various idioms of belonging on several fronts and through processes of bracketing. The paper therefore offers hitherto underexplored focus on and access into the lives of diasporan military communities that have fallen out of view in the broader literature.

Panel: F041 - Aesthetics of Power in Maritime Southeast Asia: Critical Examinations of the Theatricality of Stateliness in Historical and Contemporary Maritime Southeast Asia

Time: Saturday, March 16, 2024, 8:30 AM - 10:00 AM

Location: Room 306 (Level 3, Seattle Convention Center)

Discussants: Oona Thommes Paredes, University of California, Los Angeles and Sher Banu AL Khan, National University of Singapore

Panel Abstract:

This panel examines the theatricality of stateliness in Maritime Southeast Asia. Over the past few decades, scholars of Southeast Asia have examined wide ranging accounts of the intimate connections between artistry, pageantry and power. Clifford Geertz famously argues that “Power served pomp, not pomp power” in his examination of nineteenth-century Bali. However, arguments put forward by

scholars like Geertz have often been sidelined over ideas of power informed by European political theory, particularly that of statecraft (governance and mastery). Western political thought, working in the cynical mode of thinkers such as Weber, Marx or Schmitt, has historically framed pomp and rituals as the outcome of power rather than a constituent factor of it. This tradition argues that aesthetics and presentation are manifestations of the distribution of power and wealth that result from the exercise of authority and are ultimately marginal elements of governance. As a result, ceremonial and symbolic dimensions of power such as stateliness (dignity and presence) and estate (status and ranking) are dismissed as insignificant.

Informed by historical and contemporary practices of displaying power and their complex importance across Southeast Asia, this panel asks how extravagance, splendor, and grandeur relate to state power in the region. How has displaying power substantiated royal and non-royal authorities? What stylistic changes have taken place in state insignia and ritual as governance changes? Can we challenge our ideas about how aesthetics and power intersect by studying Southeast Asian state practices from both historical and contemporary perspectives?

Paper 1:

The Politics of Opulence: A Critical Examination of Negara Political Culture Surrounding Kingship, Pomp, and Wealth in Contemporary Brunei

Presenter and Panel Co-organizer: Abdul Muizz Abdul Khalid, University of Brunei Darussalam



Paper Abstract:

In Southeast Asia, Brunei remains as the only independent ruling kingdom. It is a modern monarchy renowned for its opulence and extravagance earned from vast oil reserves. What is the significance of opulence in Bruneian politics? How did pomp and wealth coexist in Brunei? This paper historically examines how oil wealth, in combination with the interplay of British colonial policies and royal statesmanship, allowed the *negara* tradition of pomp and ceremonialism to continue as an important feature of Bruneian political culture. On the one hand, the British government's decision to set up a residential system in Brunei was partly driven by its prospects for oil. Under the residential system, British officials secured the Bruneian monarchy and strengthened royal pomp and ceremonialism in the kingdom. In particular, the British reinvented royal rites by increasing the level of grandiosity, such as introducing new customs and designing novel garments, which have since come to be known as "royal tradition" in Brunei. On the other hand, the enormous influx of oil revenue provided the Sultan of Brunei the economic leverage to decline the offer to join the Malaysian Federation in July 1963. The retention of oil revenues allowed for the continuation of pomp and ceremonialism, with royal residences, regalia, and monuments becoming part of state theatrics and optics. As such, displays and aesthetics of royal stateliness continue to be of utmost importance in the country, where power and pomp are both equally critical to Bruneian political culture.

Paper 2: Viceroy, Pseudo-Raja, and President of the Republic: Reforming and Reframing the Parliamentary Head of State in Singapore, 1959-70

Presenter: Muhammad Suhail Bin Mohamed Yazid, University of Cambridge

Paper Abstract:

Within a decade from 1959, Singapore underwent a series of constitutional transformations. This paper interrogates the attendant remodelings of the island's parliamentary head of state across this period. Although this understudied institution was primarily occupied by Yusof bin Ishak, the traditions, rituals, and ceremonies that accompanied its incarnations as governor, Yang di-Pertuan Negara, and president reflected the shifting projections of Singapore's political status. As the island morphed from a British colony to a self-governing state, and later on from a component of the Malaysian federation to an independent republic, the office's stylistic changes reflected symbolic recastings of sovereignty. These revisions embodied the island's moving placement within different international orders encompassing the empire-Commonwealth, the Malay World, and the Global South. Stately displays of this nature were also imbued with ambivalent narratives to instrumentalise the pomp and pageantry for political projects of the People's Action Party (PAP) government. When the theatrics attached to this office are seen as coeval with the legal-constitutional struggle for self-determination, the story of Singapore's decolonisation becomes more contested, contingent, and colourful.



Paper 3: The Real Politik of Regattas and Banquets: Continuities and Ruptures between the White Rajahs and Democratic Sarawak State Power Aesthetics
Presenter, Panel Co-organizer and Chair:
Asmus Randsløv Rungby, Yale University

Paper Abstract:

This paper examines how the state of Sarawak, one of two Malaysian states on Borneo, has utilized grand events to portray heads of state. Comparing the monarchical practices of the 19th-20th Brooke regime to the practices of the contemporary democratically elected GPS government it charts the shifts and continuities in staging, aesthetics, and rituals of state/population interactions. The Brooke era regattas prioritized the display of military capacity and the domination of waterways, to engage an audience through spectacles of wealth and command. Placing these displays of cross-community unity under the Rajahs authority in the middle of the capitol served to remind subjects of the supremacy of the ruler and his capacity to overcome local divisions. Similarly, the contemporary coalition government of Sarawak wields banquets and receptions to convey the wealth and magnanimity of the head of state prime minister Abang Johari. Similar signifiers of harmony and grandeur are displayed here but rather than signifiers of economic competence echo contemporary developmentalist policies. I emphasize how historical presentations of state pomp are echoed and actively wielded by contemporary politicians but that claims of authority have changed and elements of both capitalist and populist aesthetics now format a different executive authority and which seeks to

convey popular prosperity rather than royal supremacy.

Panel: F045 - Queering and Gendering Southeast Asia

Time: Saturday, March 16, 2024, 8:30 AM - 10:00 AM

Location: Room 616 (Level 6, Seattle Convention Center)

Paper: Spatializing the Pink Dot Movement in Singapore: An Urban Landscape Approach

Presenter: Charles Starks, University of Pennsylvania

Paper Abstract:

Scholarship on queer spaces in contemporary cities has tended to treat them as small enclaves hidden from wider society, and increasingly moving from physical space into the everywhere-and-nowhere of the Internet. Periodic public events, such as Pride marches, are an enduring exception to queer invisibility and placelessness. The annual Pink Dot rally in Singapore's Hong Lim Park has been, since 2009, by far the largest and most visible such queer event in the city-state. Existing scholarship on Pink Dot has contextualized the event within the political and socio-economic circumstances of Singapore and (to some degree) the wider ASEAN region, but to date there has been little examination of Pink Dot from a spatial and urbanistic perspective. In this paper I aim to demonstrate how Pink Dot organizers, private business, and the state have been engaged in the mutual shaping and re-shaping of the park and the surrounding neighborhoods, both physically and socially. I characterize Pink Dot as an unacknowledged participant in Singapore's



inner-city redevelopment and heritage conservation schemes, which have intensively reconfigured the areas surrounding the park into major hubs of entertainment, tourism, and finance, while maintaining at least a veneer of the city's historic shophouse urbanism. Using personal observations of the 2023 Pink Dot festival, photographic and geospatial examination of the neighborhood, and conversations with activists, I probe why and how Pink Dot has quickly become a fixture of Singapore's queer (and non-queer) life and suggest possible futures.

Panel: G028 - The Transformation of Scientific Medicine and Public Health in 20th Century East Asia

Time: Saturday, March 16, 2024, 2:00 PM - 3:30 PM

Location: Capitol Hill (3rd Floor, Sheraton Grand Seattle)

Paper: Therapeutic Trial of Malaria Drugs on Plantations in British Malaya

Presenter: Jiun Shen Fong, National Taiwan University

Paper Abstract:

This paper examines the therapeutic testing of malaria drugs in British Malaya by analyzing articles and archives from the League of Nations (LON) and the Institute for Medical Research (IMR) in Kuala Lumpur. It focuses on the collaboration between British Malaya and the Malaria Commission of the LON, which aimed to find cost-effective anti-malarial alternatives to quinine. The trials involved various secondary alkaloid mixtures and synthetic drugs, such as cinchona febrifuge, Plasmoquine, and

Totaquina. In 1935, international efforts sponsored by the Malaria Commission of the LON evaluated the prophylactic benefits of these mixtures in locations including Algeria, Sardinia, Romania, the USSR, and Malaya.

The significance of Malaya's participation in the efficacy tests lies in the detailed methods and scientific practices employed. The IMR conducted trials on plantations in Selangor, a region known for severe malaria. By determining the optimal dosage for Asians exposed to intense malaria, the trials established the interval and effectiveness of malaria drugs. The plantations served as controlled environments for mosquito populations, enabling the testing of naturally infected laborers.

Notably, few studies have explored the formation of networks or alliances within Southeast Asian countries for disseminating medical knowledge and technologies in the field of international health. The therapeutic testing of malaria drugs in British Malaya provides valuable insights into this aspect.

Panel: H015 - Doing Families: Legal, Cultural, and Affective Negotiations across Borders in Asia

Time: Saturday, March 16, 2024, 4:00 PM - 5:30 PM

Location: Room 606 (Level 6, Seattle Convention Center)

Paper: Malaysian Frontier Mothers: Biopower and the Struggle for Malaysian Citizenship of Children Born Outside Malaysia



Presenter: Shanthi Thambiah, University of Malaya

Paper Abstract:

Citizenship is a fundamental aspect of the governance of transnational families within the nation-state. Article 14 of the Malaysian Constitution stipulates that “every person born outside the federation whose father is at the time of the birth a citizen” are automatically Malaysian citizen. But children of Malaysian mothers who are married to non-citizens and born abroad must seek citizenship under these state-constructed definition of citizen. According to a decision made by the High Court on September 9, 2021, the word “father” in paragraph 1(b) and 1 (c) of Part II of the Second Schedule of the Federal Constitution shall be interpreted harmoniously to include “mother”. However, the government appealed against the High Court decision and the Court of Appeal reversed this historic decision on August 5, 2022. In this presentation I draw on Michel Foucault (1976; 1991; 2008) to argue that the legal domain is not just a neutral space where behaviour is regulated but is actually a site where subjects and discourses are created and the nation is constructed. Foucault’s notion of bio-power is particularly relevant in the governmentality of transnational families.

Panel: H036 - Challenges of Democratic Governance in Malaysia Since 2018

Time: Saturday, March 16, 2024, 4:00 PM - 5:30 PM

Location: Greenwood (3rd Floor, Sheraton Grand Seattle)

Panel Abstract:

The autocratic Barisan Nasional coalition that ruled Malaysia for more than six decades was finally defeated in the May 2018 general elections. After the Pakatan Harapan opposition alliance took power, the new government ruled for only 22 months before collapsing in February 2020. Shifting alliances and divided loyalties over vexing policy choices meant that Malaysia would see another three Prime Ministers in three years. This diverse panel studies the tumultuous period of Malaysian politics and its contentious policies after the BN's defeat, highlighting key learning points for the challenges of democratization and governance after the defeat of a long-dominant authoritarian regime. The panel begins with two papers examining complexities surrounding Malaysia’s attitudes towards citizenship and immigration. Using an ethnographic sensitivity to examine Malaysia’s policies towards stateless persons, Cheong critiques the burdens placed on them as well as broader organizational logics of the Malaysian nation-state. Through a unique survey experiment, however, Siow finds that xenophobic prejudice towards immigrants in Malaysia may be mitigated by the ability of its citizens to code-switch via their multi-lingual abilities.

The panel’s next two papers then zoom out to a macro analysis of Malaysia’s transition. Interviews with political elites by Ong reveal how euphoric public expectations, government inexperience, intra-alliance conflicts, and countermobilization by ex-incumbents cripple the newly elected government from enacting its policy agendas. Ostwald’s paper studies why and how Malaysia’s ideologically bounded democracy constrains its new governments from



making significant changes in policies. Maznah Mohamad provides discussant comments from a sociological and gendered perspective.

Paper 1: Who Counts As a Stateless Person? Nation-Statist Logics & the Burdens of “Citizenship in Potentia” in Malaysia
Presenter: Amanda Cheong, University of British Columbia

Paper Abstract:

This paper ethnographically investigates dilemmas surrounding who counts as a stateless person in the context of Malaysia. I argue that the Malaysian state’s mobilization of a *nation-statist logic*—according to which all persons must minimally belong somewhere—serves to produce stateless people by political, juridical, and bureaucratic denials of their very possibility. Politicians, government lawyers, and registration officers sought to classify persons claiming Malaysian citizenship *not* as stateless, but instead as “illegal foreigners,” in efforts to shunt legal and moral responsibility for their inclusion elsewhere within the nation-state system. These practices created a major evidentiary hurdle for citizenship claimants: what I call the primordialist burdens of presumed “citizenship *in potentia*,” which undermined the Malaysian citizenship claims of people of migrant descent by attributing to them a *prima facie* capacity to claim citizenship elsewhere. By analytically centering statelessness—its legal and political antecedents, its diverse manifestations, and the ways that it is experienced and contested—this paper offers new avenues through which to critique the organizational logics of our contemporary nation-state system.

Paper 2: Language of Instruction, Educational and Socioeconomic Outcomes: Natural Experimental Evidence from Two Studies in Malaysia

Presenter: Jeremy Siow, Washington University in St. Louis

Paper Abstract:

This paper investigates the effects of adopting a non-native language as the medium of instruction in schools on both short-term educational and long-term socioeconomic outcomes. Leveraging a quasi-experimental variation in the language of instruction used in Malaysian schools, I assess the impact of an education reform in Malaysia, where English replaced the native language as the medium of instruction for Math and Science in all public schools since 2003. In Study 1, I analyze whether this change influenced students’ Math and Science test scores using a synthetic control method and data from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Studies. Finally, Study 2 examines the long-term effects of this reform by investigating its impact on employment and income outcomes through an original survey conducted in Malaysia in 2022.

Paper 3: What Happens after Victory? Lessons from Malaysia and Developmental Asia

Presenter and Panel Organizer: Elvin Ong, National University of Singapore

Paper Abstract:

The existing literature on democratization frequently views the defeat of dominant autocratic incumbents as democratization’s single biggest challenge. What happens in the period after the dictator is displaced and the



opposition comes to power is generally overlooked theoretically and empirically. In this paper, I argue that what happens after opposition victory is at least equally if not more challenging for democratization than plotting for autocratic defeat. Specifically, newly victorious opposition parties tremble under the weight of euphoric expectations from their partisan supporters baying for transitional justice, demanding radical political change, and impatient for immediate results. Governance inexperience, intra-governmental conflicts, and counter-mobilization by the supporters of the defeated incumbents further threaten to push newly victorious governments over the edge of the precipice. Drawing from interview data with insider elites of Malaysia's short-lived Pakatan Harapan alliance government, I demonstrate how governments formed after an autocrat's defeat is almost always set up for governance failure, political instability, and institutional stasis. Preliminary comparisons of autocratic electoral turnover episodes in Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, Philippines, and Myanmar reveal similarities and differences with Malaysia's tumultuous experience.

Paper 4: Malaysia's Ideologically-Bounded Democracy

Presenter: Kai Ostwald, University of British Columbia

Paper Abstract:

Malaysia is no longer a dominant party hybrid regime, as it was under the long stretch of UMNO's hegemonic rule. But neither has Malaysia transitioned to a full democracy, as many features that characterized the previous regime remain in place. This is most apparent in

the ideological framework that UMNO used to justify and bolster its rule prior to the transition, namely that the majority Malay community is uniquely vulnerable to domination by other groups, and must thus be afforded extensive political, social, and economic justifications. This framework was entrenched throughout the state *and* segments of the electorate over decades, such that it pervades nearly all dimensions of politics and public policy. Importantly, UMNO's defeat in 2018 did not discredit or otherwise undermine this framework; to the contrary, the framework retains extensive public support and is widely seen as an uncontested feature of Malaysian politics. This paper lays out the argument that this has important implications for post-transition politics, namely that political competition and policy creation now occur relatively freely within the bounds of the ideological framework, but remain highly constrained beyond them. That makes Malaysia a unique post-authoritarian regime which remains hybrid in nature, but without many of the authoritarian features that characterized it during the height of UMNO's dominance.

Panel: H043 - Place-Making in City Neighborhoods of Southeast Asia (Part 1)
Time: Saturday, March 16, 2024, 4:00 PM - 5:30 PM

Location: Room 211 (Level 2, Seattle Convention Center)

Paper: Of Space, Place, Time and Technology in Bukit Merah, Singapore

Presenters: Jennifer Ang and Janice Kam, Singapore University of Social Sciences



Paper Abstract:

Bukit Merah Town was developed after WWI from a land with numerous hills, lowlands and swamps to a modern town where the Central Business District (CBD) is located, with landmarks and some of the earliest public housing estates. In its latest development plans, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) proposed an expansion of the CBD with the building of high-end waterfront residential living, improvement of green-spaces connectivity, and a redevelopment of housing in the nearby old neighborhoods. These neighborhoods surrounding heritage sites are home to some of the largest concentration of Singapore's public rental flats occupied by elderly and low-income families with limited accessibility to technology. An obvious concern will be that an uneven development plan will make the socio-economic divide of these older communities more apparent. Yet, development may disrupt the relatively strong sense of identity and belonging that is tightly tied to the history of the place and the power of agency and capacity for self-help. This paper will analyze the notion of development (or the lack of) as a care relationship between time and technology. It will first examine how development is largely synonymised with technological advancement in Singapore's Smart Nation movement, and proceed to examine how technology interacts with time that is imprinted in infrastructures of heritage sites, and where time is marked in aging communities within an aging space. It will conclude on how development in its different forms and levels of care is understood across Bt Merah by analyzing the relationship between time and technology.

Sunday, March 17, 2024

Panel: K015 - Transnational Networks of Knowledge and Intellectual Practice in the Making of the Mid-Late 20th-Century Sinophone World

Time: Sunday, March 17, 2024, 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM

Location: Issaquah B (3rd Floor, Sheraton Grand Seattle)

Discussant: Rachel Leow, University of Cambridge

Panel Abstract:

Starting in 1986, university students from Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Malaysia, and the People's Republic of China (PRC) converged in Singapore to participate in a biennial, televised Mandarin-language debate competition known as the Asian Inter-Varsity Debates (Yazhou dazhuan bianlun hui, or AIVD). My paper argues that the AIVD, whose first two iterations were won by teams from Peking (PKU) and Fudan Universities, was constitutive of an emerging intellectual, as opposed to simply material, infrastructure of late 20th-century Sinophone capitalism that enabled elite youths to internalize market values and practices within a shared cultural-linguistic framework. It further argues that PKU and Fudan's participation in the AIVD, their interest in "Singapore-style" debate as a model for China, and the excitement that their victories generated back home contributed to an ongoing conceptual transformation of bianlun (debate) in the Reform-era PRC. As one of the "four greats" (sida) from the 1950s to the 1970s, especially during the Cultural Revolution, bianlun was a mechanism for exposing and



correcting ordinary persons' false thinking in accordance with socialist orthodoxy. By contrast, the AIVD helped popularize *bianlun* as a seemingly depoliticized form of intellectual performance by elite individuals, whose dialectical engagement with others was carefully regulated and evaluated by putatively objective authorities. This paper, therefore, demonstrates the importance of the Sinophone world and Singapore in particular as a site for PRC elites' intellectual socialization into capitalism.

Paper 1: Transfers of Chinese Educational Knowledge and the Mobility of Chinese Students and Teachers between Hong Kong, Singapore, and North Borneo
Presenter: Doris Chan, Nanyang Technological University

Paper Abstract:

Chinese education in Southeast Asia after the Second World War was closely intertwined with the politics of the Cold War and decolonization, and questions of race, culture, and identity. This paper focuses on Chinese-medium education in North Borneo (the state of Sabah in East Malaysia today), which in the 1950s-60s lacked qualified teachers, could provide its pupils with only limited opportunities for higher education, and was under considerable pressure from the British colonial government to promote the use of English. Given that these and other problems were shared by Hong Kong and Singapore, the three Chinese school systems developed in connection with each other, as this paper demonstrates by exploring transfers of knowledge about Chinese education and the mobility of Chinese students and teachers between Hong Kong, Singapore, and North

Borneo. Drawing mainly upon newspaper articles from North Borneo in the early 1960s and state archives in Singapore and Sabah, it reveals how networks of persons and knowledge remained flexible and fluid and in the hands of nonstate actors. They thus reinforced colonial connections and helped constitute British Southeast Asia and Hong Kong as an interconnected social and intellectual space during the age of decolonization.

Paper 4: Resignifying *Bianlun*: The Asian Inter-Varsity Debates As an Intellectual Infrastructure of Sinophone Capitalism
Presenter: Chien-Wen Kung, National University of Singapore

Paper Abstract:

Starting in 1986, university students from Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, Malaysia, and the People's Republic of China (PRC) converged in Singapore to participate in a biennial, televised Mandarin-language debate competition known as the Asian Inter-Varsity Debates (*Yazhou dazhuan bianlun hui*, or AIVD). My paper argues that the AIVD, whose first two iterations were won by teams from Peking (PKU) and Fudan Universities, was constitutive of an emerging intellectual, as opposed to simply material, infrastructure of late 20th-century Sinophone capitalism that enabled elite youths to internalize market values and practices within a shared cultural-linguistic framework. It further argues that PKU and Fudan's participation in the AIVD, their interest in "Singapore-style" debate as a model for China, and the excitement that their victories generated back home contributed to an ongoing conceptual transformation of *bianlun* (debate) in the Reform-era PRC. As



one of the "four greats" (*sida*) from the 1950s to the 1970s, especially during the Cultural Revolution, *bianlun* was a mechanism for exposing and correcting ordinary persons' false thinking in accordance with socialist orthodoxy. By contrast, the AIVD helped popularize *bianlun* as a seemingly depoliticized form of intellectual performance by elite individuals, whose dialectical engagement with others was carefully regulated and evaluated by putatively objective authorities. This paper, therefore, demonstrates the importance of the Sinophone world and Singapore in particular as a site for PRC elites' intellectual socialization into capitalism.

Panel: K033 - Race and Racialization in British Southeast Asia-Sponsored by MSB Studies Group

Time: Sunday, March 17, 2024, 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM

Location: Room 305 (Level 3, Seattle Convention Center)

Panel Chair and Discussant: Vineeta Sinha, National University of Singapore

Panel Abstract:

Much of the literature historicizing race in Malaya/Malaysia/Singapore focuses on technologies of knowledge production about colonized subjects, exemplified most quintessentially by the census. Taking this as a jumping-off point, this panel asks how other sites of racialization—from the ship to constitution making, from sexual regulation to citizenship claims—might produce effects that reinforce, inflect, or even subvert more well-studied mechanisms of racial formation. Sundarsingh contends that the shipboard journeys of

indentured workers and lascars from South Asia, including colonial attempts to regulate social order on board, constitute significant sites of subject formation that preceded racialization on Malayan plantations. The following paper by Lee examines the "Malayan sexual perversion cases" of the 1930s—which stimulated the enactment of the anti-sodomy law in the Straits Settlements Penal Code—to argue that the racialized emotions articulated in panics around interracial intimacies revealed the contingencies and crisis of the rule of colonial difference. Subsequently, Abdullah Sani's paper analyzes constitution making in the wake of the Japanese occupation (1941–1945) by a multiracial coalition that sought to challenge dominant ideas of race and citizenship put forth by the nationalist elite, thereby envisioning the Malayan nation anew. Finally, Wan queries how racial categories that formed the baseplate for citizenship policy in Peninsular Malaysia were put into question in Malaysian Borneo, as Orang Ulu and Chinese stateless persons made citizenship claims in the aftermath of Konfrontasi (1963–1966). Taken together, these papers track how colonial knowledge about race circulated, were contested, and became embodied.

Paper 1: Changing Horizons: South Asians and the Social World Aboard Ships Transporting Indentured Workers in the Indian Ocean World

Presenter: Alexandra T. Sundarsingh, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Paper Abstract:

The shipboard journey is a seminal moment in the experience of the indentured worker. Compared to other common locations such as the Caribbean, indenture in Southeast Asia



involved a much shorter journey from South Asia. This paper uses archival materials to consider the ship as a space of social mixing for South Asians aboard. It makes a detailed investigation of the circumstances in which lascar crewmen, paying passengers, and indentured labourers travelling between South Asian and Southeast Asian ports would have encountered each other, and the way that shipboard conditions would have limited or expanded the social worlds of all involved. Indentured workers lived under oppressive and coercive conditions, and arrived aboard the ship after signing contracts with dubious levels of consent. Lascars too were in constrained circumstances of arrival and work aboard the ships. The English colonial government however, cultivated an image of health and relative freedom on its 'passenger' ships where they 'protected' the social order as they understood it. This paper contrasts that with shifting understandings of caste, gender, family, and community that the multi-layered social world of the ship produced even before the social rearrangement of the plantations in Malaya.

Paper 2: Minor Articulations: Racialized Emotions and the "Malayan 'Sexual Perversion' Cases," 1938-1940

Presenter: Jack Jin Gary Lee, The New School for Social Research

Paper Abstract:

This study turns to recently declassified files that cast new light on the origins of Singapore's anti-sodomy law, i.e. Section 377a of the Penal Code, which was only repealed in 2022. In 1938, the police's "discovery" of homosexual relations between European elites and Asian men became

the grounds for the colonial state's concerted attempts to regulate male official conduct and sexual practices in British Malaya. Faced with what they saw as an apparent "epidemic," officials fretted over a range of measures aimed at deterring sexual deviance and preserving the prestige of the colony's European elites. Officials' anxieties over difference, racial and sexual, sat at the center of the crisis that the "Malayan sexual perversion cases" generated, leading to the development of both legal and extra-legal measures aimed at the policing of homosexuality and the protection of the "rule of colonial difference" in the Straits Settlements and beyond (Chatterjee 1993; Kolsky 2005). Racialized emotions thus articulated differing modes of domination to one other, as a panic over homosexual acts was linked to the shame brought by the failure of European men to fulfill their duties of trusteeship. While framed in the language of "public interest," the colonial policing of inter-racial sexual relations was oriented toward the valorized image of European heterosexual masculinity. Reading "along the archival grain" (Stoler 2010), my historical ethnography also uncovers the obscured existence of the same-sex, cross-racial intimacies – what I call "minor articulations" – that frustrated officials' attempts to find a swift resolution to this saga.

Paper 3: Constitution, Citizenship, and State-Building in Post-War Malaya

Presenter: Hanisah Abdullah Sani, National University of Singapore

Paper Abstract:

In the aftermath of the second world war, nascent nationalist and independence



movements resisted the returning British forces, rejected the MacMichael Treaties, and opposed the Malayan Union. Despite their disparate backgrounds and ideological positions, they cobbled together a precarious alliance to organize for independence and to challenge the ethnic and religious chauvinism of nationalist elites. They drafted terms of a new constitution and discussed conditions of rightful citizenship for an independent and inclusive Malaya. This paper considers this twilight period in Malaya's postwar history as one of the earliest sites of struggles at reimagining the nation anew. It considers efforts to expand conceptions of citizenship beyond primordial theories of stock and race and to consider modern theories of birthright and loyalty to a limited and sovereign nation.

Paper 4: Citizenship Claims and Illicit Mobilities in Malaysian Borneo in Konfrontasi's Wake
Presenter and Panel Organizer: Darren Wan, Cornell University

Paper Abstract:

When Indonesia waged an undeclared war against Malaysia on the eve of its formation in 1963, the notoriously difficult to police 1,881 km border that bisected Borneo became significantly more militarized. As a result, people who crossed the border and communities whose social lives straddled it came to seem out of place in the eyes of the state. While the porosity of the border used to be more tolerated, it became an existential threat in the context of the Cold War, and measures—including the denial of citizenship rights to mobile subjects—were taken by the anticommunist Malaysian state to reduce the risk of communist infiltration.

My paper focuses on two different groups who articulated Malaysian citizenship claims that were contentious largely because of their ties to Indonesian Kalimantan. The first are the Orang Ulu, a collective term for various upland indigenous groups who have historically lived lives in the mountainous area that became cleaved by the border. The second are Chinese people from Kalimantan who, faced with the rising tide of anti-Chinese and anticommunist sentiment in 1960s Indonesia, sought refuge in Malaysian Borneo. By bringing together citizenship issues faced by Orang Ulu and Chinese people in the same analytic frame, this paper draws on archival documents and oral history interviews to examine how and why binary categories of “native” and “migrant”—which form the basis of racially differentiated citizenship policy in Peninsular Malaysia—are treated by bureaucratic institutions as unstable indices of loyalty in the East Malaysian context.

Panel: L010 - China and Southeast Asia: Entanglements and Engagements-Sponsored by AAS East and Inner Asia Council
Time: Sunday, March 17, 2024, 10:45 AM - 12:15 PM
Location: Issaquah B (3rd Floor, Sheraton Grand Seattle)

Paper: Reimagining Nanyang: Wartime Malay Archipelago in the Eyes of Leftist Chinese Intellectuals
Presenter: Kankan Xie, Peking University

Paper Abstract:

The first half of the 20th century saw the surge of Chinese immigrants to the Malay Archipelago, which included merchants, diplomats,



revolutionaries, and intellectuals. For the latter group, the primary purpose of going to Southeast Asia was not to seek better livelihoods but rather work with the large overseas Chinese population whose political and economic influence had become increasingly significant in China. During the Sino-Japanese conflict, the overseas Chinese became an indispensable source of revenue supporting China's military efforts. As a result, both the nationalist Guomindang (GMD) government and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) sent numerous officials and activists to Southeast Asia to organize the National Salvation Movement (NSM), which focused on collecting funds, boycotting Japanese goods, and recruiting volunteer drivers to serve on the Chinese battleground. This paper examines the unusual experience of Yu Dafu, Hu Yuzhi, and Wang Renshu, three leftist intellectuals who arrived in Singapore around the late 1930s and played critical roles in the NSM by assuming editorial and teaching positions at local Chinese newspapers and schools. After the fall of Singapore in 1942, all three intellectuals escaped to Sumatra and lived incognito throughout the Japanese occupation. While in Sumatra, they actively engaged in learning Malay, observing the Chinese community vis-à-vis the native society, and reflecting on the past and future of the Malay Archipelago in their writings. This paper seeks to address the significance of their writings to understand Southeast Asia during a period of rapid transformation.



Article

XU BEIHONG AND LIU HAIJU'S FUNDRAISING ART EXHIBITIONS DURING THE SECOND SINO- JAPANESE WAR IN NANYANG

Wu Zuzhi

Universiti Sains Malaysia

During the first half of the 20th century, China experienced a long period of social unrest and political changes. Xu Beihong and Liu Haisu, both renowned Chinese artists and art educators during the Second Sino-Japanese War, held fundraising art exhibitions in Nanyang (Southeast Asia) to support their homeland's war effort. Xu Beihong is internationally known as Ju-Peon or Hsu-Pei-Hung. On March 10, 1939, the Singapore English-language newspaper "Morning Tribune" produced the headline "Famous Chinese artist to give local exhibition" (Figure 1), praising Xu Beihong as one of the greatest Chinese contemporary artists. His name is widely popular among fine art enthusiasts across Europe (Morning Tribune, 1939, p. 17). A year later on December 21, 1940, the "Nanyang Siang Pau" newspaper published a news article titled "Renowned artist Liu Haisu will arrive in Singapore this morning" (Figure 2), describing Liu Haisu as "our country's famous artist" and highlighting his social prominence (Nanyang Siang Pau, 1940, p. 7). Through archival research and case studies, this article aims to compare and analyze Xu and Liu's Singapore exhibitions during the Second Sino-Japanese War to provide

a comprehensive and clear account of their fundraising art exhibitions in Singapore at that time.



Figure 1 Morning Tribune's headline about Xu Beihong on March 10, 1939, that read "Famous Chinese artist to give local exhibition".¹

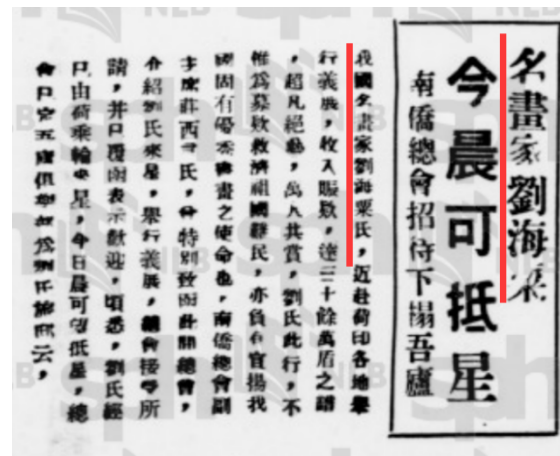


Figure 2 Nanyang Siang Pau's headline about Liu Haisu on December 21, 1940, that read "Renowned artist will arrive in Singapore this morning".

¹ All the images in this article are from National Library Board Singapore unless otherwise stated.



During the Second Sino-Japanese War, both Xu Beihong and Liu Haisu held fundraising art exhibitions across various locations in Nanyang. The exhibitions by Xu Beihong were held in Singapore and the Malay Peninsula of Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, and Penang. In March 1939, Xu Beihong's first fundraising art exhibition in Nanyang was held in Singapore, setting a record for the highest number of visitors in Singapore's exhibition history at that time. Over 30,000 out of the 600,000 people in Singapore visited Xu Beihong's exhibition, constituting a 1:20 attendance ratio from the entire nation's population (Au Yeung, 2020, p. 242). Meanwhile, Liu Haisu traveled to the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) at the end of 1939 and held fundraising art exhibitions in Batavia, Surabaya, Semarang, Bandung, Singapore, and Ipoh. The total amount raised from Liu Haisu's exhibitions in the Dutch East Indies was approximately 400,000 guilders while Xu Beihong's Singapore exhibition in 1941 raised over 20,000 Straits Dollars, setting a record for the highest fundraising amount for all fundraising art exhibitions in Singapore during the war (Li & Liu, 2022, p. 83).

Xu Beihong and Liu Haisu's Singapore Fundraising Art Exhibition

In January 1939, Xu Beihong arrived at Singapore from Hong Kong with over a thousand of his artworks and collections. His arrival received widespread attention from the local Chinese community in Singapore owing to his fame and influence at the time. Many art organizations in Singapore, including the Society of Chinese Artists and the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA), invited Xu Beihong to give lectures. Additionally, numerous articles and news

regarding his exhibition were published by major Chinese (e.g., Nanyang Siang Pau, Sin Chew Jit Poh, and The Union Times) and English newspapers (e.g., Straits Times, Malaya Tribune, and Morning Tribune) in Singapore. Xu Beihong's fundraising art exhibition in Singapore was organized by the Singapore China Relief Fund, which also organized the Professor Xu Beihong Exhibition Committee. To promote the exhibition and achieve better fundraising results, several articles introducing Xu Beihong's life, artistic ideas, and artworks were published in the morning edition of Sin Chew Jit Poh on March 2, 1939. Subsequently, Nanyang Siang Pau published exhibition notices on March 3 and 4, providing extensive publicity and introduction to the time, location, and opening guests of the fundraising exhibition.

Xu Beihong's exhibition was originally scheduled to be held at the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce from March 4th to 12th. However, considering his high reputation, the organizers changed their original plan, resulting in multiple rescheduling and changes in exhibition venues (Sin Chew Jit Poh, 1939, p. 5). The exhibition's opening date was finally determined upon conclusion of the installation ceremony of the Sultan of Perak, which was attended by the Governor-General of the Straits Settlements, Sir Shenton Thomas, and his wife (Figure 3) (Au Yeung, 2020, p. 16).

The Xu Beihong Singapore exhibition took place from March 15th to 16th at Victoria Memorial Hall and then moved to the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce from March 18th to 26th, lasting a total of 10 days. The exhibited works were diverse, including a total of 172 pieces from



his studies in France, his time at Central University after returning to China, and his recent works. The works comprised oil paintings, traditional Chinese paintings, and sketches. More than 200 artworks by well-known Chinese and foreign artists collected by Xu Beihong over the years were also exhibited. To encourage and promote local artists, the exhibition also featured artworks by local artists, such as Tchang Ju Chi, Lim Hak Tai, Xu Junlian, and Zhuang Youzhao. This reflects Xu Beihong's noble spirit of spreading Chinese art to every corner of the world and enhancing the reputation and status of local artists (Au Yeung, 2020, p. 23).



Figure 3 The front-page headline of the Malaya Tribune on March 18, 1939 reporting the visit of Sir Thomas, Governor of the Straits Settlements, to Xu Beihong's fundraising art exhibition.



Figure 4 Nanyang Siang Pau's Evening Edition published on March 16, 1939 reporting Xu Beihong's Singapore fundraising art exhibition.

On March 16, 1939, the Nanyang Siang Pau's Evening Edition dedicated a whole page in both Chinese and English to introduce Xu Beihong's fundraising art exhibition (Figure 4). Several exhibition photos and artworks were included, providing a glimpse into the exhibition's atmosphere at the time. Xu Beihong's Singapore fundraising art exhibition received enthusiastic responses and left a deep impression on the audience. Au Yeung Hung Yee, an authoritative scholar in Xu Beihong studies, highly praised the 1939 Singapore exhibition, stating, "Among every 20 Singaporeans, one has visited the exhibition. The scale, scope, fundraising amount, and artistic impact of this artist's exhibition are unprecedented in the art history of Singapore



and Malaya. For decades, Xu Beihong has held multiple personal records in Singapore's art exhibitions." (Singapore Art Museum, 2008, p.73) Observation of the news and comments published in the English newspapers in Singapore further denoted that the Westerners not only actively visited Xu Beihong's fundraising art exhibition but they also highly appreciated his works and were especially eager to purchase his paintings. These news reports stand as evidence that Xu Beihong's fundraising art exhibition in Singapore was highly popular (Figure 5).

The difference between Xu Beihong's first

exhibition by Liu Haisu in the Dutch East Indies prompted Vice Chairman Zhuang Xiyan of the South Seas China Relief Fund Union to write a letter recommending him to hold an exhibition in Singapore. Chen Yanqian, the acting chairman of the South Seas China Relief Fund Union, also invited Liu Haisu to move the exhibition to Singapore (Yeo, 1992, p. 41).

As early as October 1939, Liu Haisu had included Singapore as a must-visit place for his Nanyang exhibition and he planned to visit the country after the fundraising art exhibition in Batavia (Sin Chew Jit Poh, 1939, p. 9). Following the success of his fundraising art exhibition in Batavia,



Figure 5 Major English newspapers reported the grandeur of the fundraising art exhibition held by Xu Beihong in Singapore in March 1939. Westerners deeply appreciated Xu Beihong's works and hoped to purchase them.

exhibition in Nanyang and Liu Haisu's first exhibition in Nanyang is that the former was held in Singapore while the latter was held in Batavia (now Jakarta), Dutch East Indies. However, Dutch East Indies and Singapore were close neighbors; hence, the successful fundraising art

various overseas Chinese communities invited him to hold exhibitions. Even the Dutch East Indies Art Museum borrowed some of Liu Haisu's personal works for touring exhibitions in various places (Ta Kung Pao (Hong Kong), 1940). This was unexpected for Liu Haisu, so he "has not decided



on the date of arrival in Singapore" (Sin Chew Jit Poh, 1940, p. 9), and it was not until a year later that he arrived in Singapore.

On February 23, 1941, the "Professor Liu Haisu Recent Works Exhibition" was hosted by the South Seas China Relief Fund Union at the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce. Yu Dafu expressed in the preface of the special issue published for the exhibition: "Master artist Liu Haisu has spent a year in the Netherlands East Indies and has raised relief funds for the country. He has fulfilled his duty to the country in a practical and effective manner." (Liang, 2019, pp. 7-8) Consul Gao Lingbai presided over the opening of the exhibition, which was attended by over a hundred overseas Chinese leaders and political figures including Tan Kah Kee. Due to limited space, only 200 pieces were initially displayed and the exhibition was updated with new works until the 28th. Most oil paintings in the exhibition were painted during Liu Haisu's residency in the Netherlands East Indies. The exhibition was originally scheduled to end on March 4 but it was extended until March 8 due to enthusiastic response from the audience. A day before the opening, special issues about the exhibition were published in the supplementary sections of Chinese newspapers, such as Nanyang Siang Pau, Sin Chew Jit Poh, and The Union Times.¹ These three newspapers published different articles and photos about the exhibition (Figure 6).

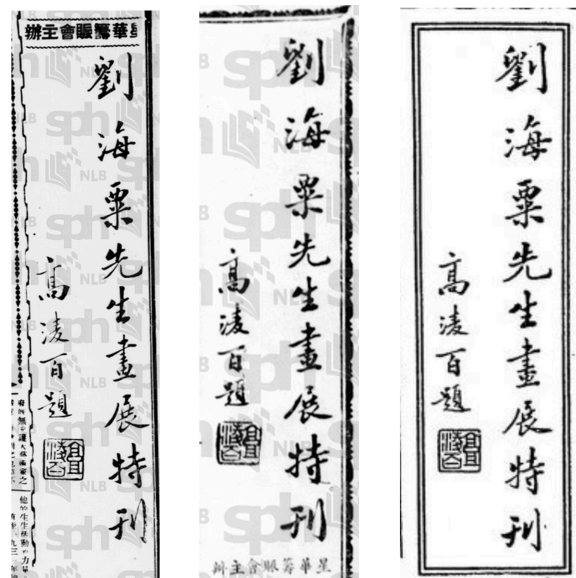


Figure 6 On the eve of Liu Haisu's fundraising art exhibition in February 1941, Consul General Gao Lingbai of Singapore wrote the titles for the special editions of Nanyang Siang Pau (left), Sin Chew Jit Poh (middle), and The Union Times (right).

The Union Times also published "Mr. Liu Haisu's Selected Masterpieces" on the front page the day before the exhibition and featured five works, including three Chinese paintings and two oil paintings (Figure 7). During the opening day on February 23, the Nanyang Siang Pau's Sunday Edition published a full-page promotion of the "Liu Haisu Recent Works Fundraising Exhibition" and featured eight Chinese paintings and two oil paintings on the front page (Figure 8).

¹ On February 22, 1941, the Chinese newspapers "Nanyang Siang Pau" on page 20, "Sin Chew Jit Poh" on page 23, and the supplement of "The Union Times" on page 4 featured articles

introducing Liu Haisu and some of his artworks on the eve of his fundraising art exhibition in Singapore.





Figure 7 On February 22, 1941, the front page of the morning edition of The Union Times featured a selection of Mr. Liu Haisu's outstanding works.



Figure 8: The front page of Nanyang Siang Pau's Sunday Edition on February 23, 1941 with the theme "Liu Haisu's Recent Works Fundraising Exhibition". Image source: National Library Board of Singapore.

Exhibition Name	Exhibition Dates	Exhibition Venues	Opening Guests	Types and Quantity of Works	Organizers and Preparations	Collection of Funds	Number of News Reports
Exhibition of Professor Xu Beihong's Works	March 15-16, 1939 March 18-26, 1939	Victoria Memorial Hall Chinese Chamber of Commerce	Sir Thomas, Governor of the Straits Settlements	Chinese and oil paintings totaling 171 pieces, 71 pieces	The Singapore China Relief Fund established "Xu Beihong Professor's Works Exhibition Committee"; Chinese supplementary newspapers published articles and works by Xu Beihong, exhibition notices, and advertisements for Xu Beihong's art collection.	15,398.95 Straits Dollars	Chinese newspapers: 57 articles English newspapers: 14 articles
Professor Liu Haisu's recent exhibition.	February 23 - March 8, 1941	Chinese Chamber of Commerce	Consul Gao Lingbai, Ambassador to Singapore	Chinese and oil paintings totaling 584 pieces; over 200 pieces were initially displayed and later replaced with new works on February 28.	The South Seas China Relief Fund Union published the "Liu Haisu Professor's Recent Works Exhibition Special Issue"; Chinese supplementary newspapers published the "Liu Haisu Exhibition Special Issue" and exhibition notices.	Over 20,000 Straits Dollars	Chinese newspapers: 52 articles English newspapers: 1 article

Table 1 A Comparison of Xu Beihong and Liu Haisu's Singapore Fundraising Art Exhibitions

Note: Chinese newspapers mainly refer to local Singaporean newspapers (e.g., Sin Chew Jit Poh, Nanyang Siang Pau, and The Union Times); English newspapers mainly refer to local English newspapers in Singapore (e.g., The Straits Times and Malaya Tribune).

The Influence of Xu Beihong and Liu Haisu's Fundraising Art Exhibitions

Concerning the influence of these exhibitions, varied opinions exist on which exhibition had a greater influence on the public and art scenes. Scholar Liang Xiaobo believes that Liu Haisu was not the only artist who went to Nanyang to hold fundraising art exhibitions at that time; but in terms of the reputation of the artist and the scale and influence of the exhibition, Liu Haisu was among the best (Liang, 2015, p. 240). Liang Xiaobo pointed out that Liu Haisu's fundraising art exhibition in Nanyang was the most successful considering his fame and the exhibition's scale. The author believes that this view is biased. Although Liu Haisu's achievements and influence in holding fundraising art exhibitions in Nanyang were



significant, based on the large number of newspapers, magazines, and scholarly works published at that time, it could be argued that Xu Beihong's fundraising art exhibition in Nanyang surpassed Liu Haisu's exhibition on certain aspects although it was held nearly two years earlier. Major Chinese newspapers in Singapore at that time, such as *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, and *The Union Times*, provided similar coverage of the two exhibitions, with Xu Beihong's fundraising art exhibition had slightly more reports (57 articles) than the one hosted by Liu Haisu (52 articles). However, the difference in coverage was significant among major English newspapers in the Nanyang region, such as *The Straits Times*, *Malaya Tribune*, *Morning Tribune*, and *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* (1884-1942). Xu Beihong's fundraising art exhibition had 14 reports in these English newspapers while the exhibition by Liu Haisu had only one newspaper article.

Regarding the exhibition venues and attending guests, Xu Beihong's exhibition was initially held at Victoria Memorial Hall and later moved to the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. Due to Xu Beihong's high reputation, the organizers changed their original intention, resulting in multiple rescheduling and relocation of the exhibition (Yang & Wang, 1992, p. 16). The opening ceremony of Xu Beihong's exhibition was attended by over a hundred guests, including the Governor of the Straits Settlements (Sir Thomas), Consul Gao Lingbai, and famous overseas Chinese leaders and social elites. On the contrary, Liu Haisu's exhibition was held at the Chinese Chamber of Commerce for ten consecutive days, presided over by Consul Gao Lingbai, and attended by more than a hundred

overseas Chinese leaders. The comparison of the two exhibitions clearly shows the difference in scale.



Figure 9 The ticket for the Xu Beihong's fundraising art exhibition at the Chinese Chamber of Commerce on March 18, 1939, was priced at one cent, as reported by *Sin Chew Jit Poh*. (Left)





Figure 10 On February 21, 1941, the ticket for Liu Haisu's fundraising art exhibition was two cents, as reported by Sin Chew Jit Poh. (Right)

Image source: National Library Board of Singapore.

In terms of fundraising results and the number of visitors, Xu Beihong's art exhibition lasted for 11 days and raised a total of 15,398 Straits Dollars, while the one by Liu Haisu lasted for 14 days and raised over 20,000 Straits Dollars. Although the former had a lower fundraising amount, it had a shorter duration compared to Liu Haisu's. Furthermore, Liu Haisu's exhibition was held nearly two years after the one held by Xu Beihong. Thus, it can be argued that the price level and purchasing power of the people who bought his artworks had increased. It is also worth noting that no charge was applied in the first two days of Xu Beihong's exhibition at Victoria Memorial Hall and it was later moved to the Chinese Chamber of Commerce where tickets were sold for only one cent (Sin Chew Jit Poh, 1939, p. 9) (Figure 9). Whereas the tickets for Liu Haisu's exhibition were sold for two cents, subsequently increasing the total amount raised (Sin Chew Jit Poh, 1941, p. 9) (Figure 10).

Regarding the number of visitors, the news reports in Nanyang Siang Pau and Sin Chew Jit Poh indicated that Xu Beihong's exhibition attracted "over four thousand", "reaching five thousand", "thousands more", "even more visitors", and "the visitors are particularly crowded" (Figure 11). By the end of the exhibition, more than 300,000 people in Singapore had visited Xu Beihong's exhibition (Yang & Wang, 1992, p. 22-23). There were only a few news reports reflecting the large number of visitors to Liu Haisu's exhibition, indirectly indicating its less popularity or influence than the one by Xu Beihong.

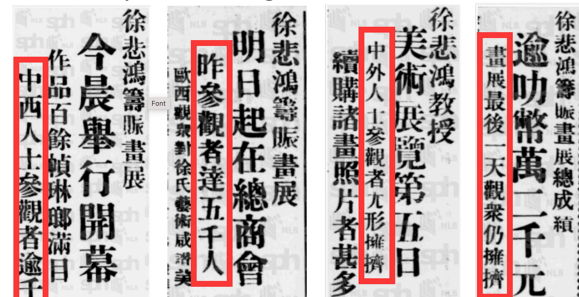


Figure 11 News headline of Xu Beihong's fundraising art exhibition published by Nanyang Siang Pau on March 1939.

Image source: National Library Board of Singapore.

Finally, concerning the influence of the artworks, the most influential work displayed in Xu Beihong's fundraising art exhibition in Singapore was undoubtedly "Tian Heng and His Five Hundred Followers" (1928-1929). This painting was reproduced as photographs and sold the most at the exhibition. It was also featured in articles and news reports across many local Chinese newspapers. The painting even sparked a pen battle between Xu Beihong and Chen Zhenxia, which reflects the impact of this



artwork (Figure 12)¹. Other works like "Jiufang Gao" and "The Three Heroes of Guangxi" were also well-loved masterpieces among the overseas Chinese and reproduced as postcards for sale. Signed photographs of Xu Beihong's works were priced at five Straits Dollars each, while unsigned ones were priced at three yuan each. Photographs of 24-inch works were priced at 25 Straits Dollars each (Sin Chew Jit Poh, 1939, p. 5). Although Liu Haisu's exhibition showcased many excellent and diverse works, it can be argued that none of them left a particularly deep impression on the audience. This is because the works in Liu Haisu's fundraising art exhibition had no large and impressive historical figure paintings like those in Xu Beihong's fundraising art exhibition.



Figure 12 In March 1939, during Xu Beihong's Singapore fundraising art exhibition, the Nanyang Siang Pau and Sin Chew Jit Poh newspapers reported that many people bought the photo painting of Xu Beihong's famous oil painting "Tian Heng and His Five Hundred Followers" and some article commented on it. Image source:..

¹ On April 17, 1939, Chen Zhenxia published an article titled "My Opinion on Xu Beihong's Tian Heng and His Five Hundred Followers" in Sin Chew Jit Poh, criticizing the lack of historical authenticity in the clothing of the figures in Xu Beihong's painting. Just three days later, on April 20, Xu Beihong responded with an article titled "The Difficulties of Historical Paintings: A Response to Mr. Chen Zhenxia" in Sin Chew Jit Poh, arguing that historical paintings do not need to be too concerned with the historical

accuracy of clothing. On May 3, Chen Zhenxia once again published an article in Sin Chew Jit Poh titled "After Reading the Difficulties of Historical Paintings, Another Opinion for Mr. Xu Beihong," criticizing the shortcomings of Xu Beihong's painting. After this brief exchange, Xu Beihong did not respond with another article. However, this back-and-forth exchange undoubtedly increased the fame of Xu Beihong's "Tian Heng and His Five Hundred Followers".

An interview with the late Singaporean pioneering artist, Liu Kang, denoted his memories of both Xu Beihong and Liu Haisu's art exhibitions in Singapore. Liu Kang emphasized that the purpose of Xu Beihong's exhibition was twofold: (1) to raise a considerable amount of funds to help with domestic relief efforts and (2) to showcase the work of such an important artist in Singapore, which had never been done before. Holding an exhibition in Singapore enabled Xu Beihong to not only raise the public's interest and appreciation for art but also provide an opportunity for local artists to learn from his remarkable artistic accomplishments. His visit also had a significant impact on various aspects of the local art scene (Oral History Centre of the National Archives of Singapore, 1982, pp. 230-231). Liu Haisu was the principal (teacher) of Liu Kang during his study at the Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts. Liu Kang advocates the belief that Liu Haisu had a substantial number of artworks on display, not just his own, but also works from other renowned Chinese artists that he brought along. Therefore, his art exhibition in Singapore not merely consisted of his personal collection but it had a significant influence on the local art scene as well. Based on Liu Kang's oral recollections, it can be inferred that Xu Beihong's fundraising art exhibition in Singapore had a slightly greater impact compared to Liu Haisu's exhibition.



Summary

Xu Beihong and Liu Haisu are renowned artists and art educators in China to this day. During the Second Sino-Japanese War, both of them went to Nanyang (Singapore) to hold fundraising art exhibitions to support the domestic war effort in China. Their decision to conduct these fundraising art exhibitions in Singapore was incidental owing to the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War. As artists, they felt a responsibility to contribute to the country's rescue efforts. The tremendous success of their exhibitions in Singapore and its profound impact on local society were mainly prompted by two reasons. Firstly, the overseas Chinese in Singapore at that time had a strong awareness of the war and they warmly welcomed and enthusiastically purchased the artworks at the fundraising exhibitions as these exhibitions not only raised funds but also showcased works by the two artists. This leads to the second reason whereby both Xu Beihong and Liu Haisu were already internationally renowned artists with great prestige, which ensured the success of their fundraising exhibitions in Singapore. This research hopes to further enhance the exposition of historical facts about the overseas activities of Chinese artists within the history of modern and contemporary Chinese art. This will ultimately highlight the value and significance of the international exchange history of modern and contemporary Chinese art.

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Interview

INTERVIEW WITH DR. SHARIFAH MUNIRAH ALATAS - REFORM AND NATION BUILDING: ESSAY ON SOCIO-POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION IN MALAYSIA¹

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Reform and Nation-Building: Essays on Socio-Political Transformation in Malaysia
Sharifah Munirah Alatas
(Association for Asian Studies, 2023)
ISBN-13: 9781952636424

¹ This text is a condensed summary of the original interview/conversation. It has been edited for brevity and clarity while preserving the main points.



In May 2018, the Malaysian opposition alliance Pakatan Harapan (PH) defeated the long-dominant Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition that had ruled Malaysia for more than six decades. PH's victory raised hopes that the country would see significant socio-economic and political reforms that had long been advocated. PH's short 22 months in government and the political turmoil that has ensued till today have meant that many reforms were not realized at all. Is the spirit of reform dead in Malaysia?

Dr. Alatas's book, *Reform and Nation Building: Essays on Socio-political Transformation in Malaysia*, explains her reflections on what has gone wrong during the reform process of Malaysia. The book is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on issues at the political leadership level, emphasizing how personal interest in political leadership and an unchanged societal mindset allow identity politics to persist as an obstacle to reforms. The second part describes the problems in higher education in Malaysia, which translates into a broader societal problem of lack of critical thinking and constructive public discourse. At the end of the book, Dr. Alatas presents her hope for the current political leadership in Malaysia, urging the readers to build a nation based on justice for everyone.

I posed a few questions to Dr. Alatas in an interview to ask her to elaborate and clarify some interesting points made in her book.

As you mentioned in your book, Malaysia is a constitutional monarchy but at the same time inherited Westminster's representative democracy parliamentary system, hence it is a different type of democracy (page 17). Can you

explain more about how democracy should be discussed in a Malaysian context? What type of democracy should Malaysia be?

Malaysia's political system is a blend of representative and procedural democracy, resembling the British Westminster model with localized adaptations. It's considered a "hybrid" regime, encompassing both democratic institutions and elements of authoritarianism and feudalism. The Yang di-Pertuan Agong, or Federal Monarch, primarily holds official, ceremonial, and representational roles. Duties include bestowing honors, dissolving parliament, and appointing the prime minister, advised by a parliament-responsible minister. Although the Federal Constitution mandates the Agong to act on the Prime Minister's advice, recent years have seen increased assertiveness by the Agong and the 9 state rulers. This shift aims to counteract excessive politicking and political volatility, evolving from patterns established post-Mahathir Mohamed's resignation in 2003. I feel the current political system we have in place works, considering the unique challenges we face. Ideally, this "hybrid" system is meant to be an efficient "checks and balances" system. The monarchy, for example, has shown its relevance in the recent political turmoil in 2020.

In general, Malaysia operates as a constitutional monarchy where Rulers abstain from political involvement to protect the royal institutions from political controversies. The monarchy serves as a unifying entity for citizens but has faced clashes with the political executive, each side accusing the other of transgressions and insubordination. Secondly, Malaysia practices parliamentary democracy, where the Executive's



power stems from the majority support of elected parliamentarians organized through political parties. These MPs are elected by the public to represent their interests, subject to scrutiny from both Opposition and government backbenchers through committees, debates, and questions in parliament. Third, Malaysia adopts federalism, dispersing political powers among Federal, Regional/State, and Local Governments. This approach aims for a balance between uniformity and autonomy, and fairness and competition among states, allowing residents to hold local authorities accountable for issues affecting their lives.

Regarding Malaysia's democratic direction, reconsideration of power-sharing, particularly through decentralization and local elections, is crucial. Despite achievements in federal-state ties during the 22 months of the PH government, certain achievements were made in federal-state ties, except the realization of local government elections. The realization of local government elections remained unaccomplished. Under the current administration, revisiting power-sharing is essential, especially in sectors like education, healthcare, transportation, and security/police, enabling focused reforms. A recent study by the Penang Institute emphasized the concept of "subsidiarity," asserting that certain functions are best handled at lower levels of government, aligning with community needs. One significant aspect is the topic of local elections, suspended in 1965 and abolished in 1976. Local elections have always been racialized. Former prime minister Mahathir Mohamed commented during his first term as PM, that local government elections would be detrimental to race relations.

He reasoned that since most of the ethnic Chinese reside in urban areas, the holding of local council elections would see Malays losing power to the Chinese, in the cities and urban centres. Malays would mainly manage the rural areas, but be totally "beholden" to the Chinese in the urban areas.

In today's context, things have changed. The urban-rural divide no longer applies. Department of Statistics (2023) says that Malaysia's total population is currently 33 million. There has been an upward trend in urbanisation. Urban areas now host around 75.1% of the population, with 62.6% bumiputeras among urbanites, compared to 28.6% Chinese. Even in rural areas, 90.4% are bumiputeras while 6.3% are Chinese. This shift makes the argument against local elections due to the bumiputera population disadvantageous. It is obvious that there is a higher population of bumiputeras living in urban areas today, so local elections being disadvantageous is a weak argument.

My hope is that the Anwar Ibrahim administration will eventually bring back local elections so Malaysians can further advance the quality of our democracy.

The book posits that Malaysians' mindset is related to the phenomenon of psychological feudalism. It further suggests that the power dynamics between those in power and the "dependents" seem to have penetrated the whole Malaysian society in different contexts, and these are not merely remnants of colonialism (Chapter 3). Can you explain more on why such feudalism persists until today



given economic development and increased general awareness of a diverse society?

I think this question is really about how certain values of pre-colonial, or pre-modern Malay society, continue to exist in modern Malaysia. There are two opposing systems that have challenged development and our desire for good governance. Malaysian scholar Shaharuddin Maaruf points out that there are two opposing traditions in Malay society today, namely the feudal and Islamic traditions. Despite having a system of electoral democracy, and after the disappearance of feudalism as a political system, Malay feudal values linger. They have penetrated the mindset of the political elite. My father, Syed Hussein Alatas wrote about this in his article “Feudalism in Malaysian Society: A Study in Historical Continuity” (1968).

In the several years leading up to the 2018 general elections (GE14), Malaysia has seen the development and imposition of a more authoritarian trend among the political and religious elite. We can see it as the further “Islamisation” of governance, coupled with the rising polarisation of our politics, based on ethnicity. However, I would not say this form of “Islamisation” is an emphasis on the moral or ethical aspects of governance. Rather, it is a combination of feudal, authoritarian, and hierarchical forms of “Islamicist” indoctrination. Both Islamisation and feudal values co-mingled in Malaysian society for centuries, i.e. dating back to the country’s pre-colonial past. The seeds of a more authoritarian and feudal and politicised interpretation of Islam were planted then. Today, the contemporary state religious establishment along with the political elite

continue to harbour a more authoritarian interpretation of Islam. The governance structure is less egalitarian and humanistic. Yet both these traits are fundamental to Islam and are compatible with modernism. However, in my opinion, our current problems with political and economic instability, as well as the rising ethnic divisions in our society, are the result of the political elite’s deviation from these fundamental tenets of Islam.

In Chapter 10, you described the 2018 14th General Elections outcome as a collective “democratic extremism” in Malaysia. Can you explain more about what you mean by democratic extremism? Why do you think that Malaysians who can collectively act for democracy are yet so easily being distracted again by racism, chauvinism, and bigotry? Are there other factors in addition to the lack of maturity and understanding of the concept of “liberal” that can explain the deviation of the common interest to pursue democracy among Malaysians?

Reflecting on Malaysian politics over the years, public discontent with corruption emerged through demonstrations, media discourse, and societal divisions along ethnic and religious lines intensified due to poor governance and corruption under the previous government. Political manipulation using race and religion further polarized society. For example, discussions about vernacular schools often pivot to debates on threats to Islam and Malays, diverting from the need to foster a patriotic society based on shared values and a common Malaysian identity. I think Malaysia’s “national” problem is largely about the search for a



Malaysian identity. Comparisons are constantly made with our neighbour Indonesia which seems to have a patriotic population with shared symbols of national unity.

In this chapter, I addressed criticisms of the Pakatan Harapan government post-GE14. Swift and harsh critiques arose, particularly targeting the Minister of Education, Maszlee Malik. Despite his proactive amendments to the University and University Colleges Act 1971 and efforts for higher education reform, little acknowledgment was given, and criticisms outweighed commendations. There was impatience regarding reforms outlined in the manifesto, lacking an understanding of Malaysia's political culture and the necessity of gradual, careful reforms due to societal divisions. The delay in the PM handover from Mahathir to Anwar contributed to an anxious and critical public.

While Maszlee faced criticism for assuming the Presidency of the International Islamic University of Malaysia, his decision to step down from the position was commendable. Yet, the focus remained on his missteps rather than the significant reforms during his tenure. Instances like the switch from white to black shoes in schools and the introduction of Jawi calligraphy became polarized debates but eventually settled without major issues. Despite criticism, Maszlee showed integrity by retracting questionable stances and holding firm on issues with positive long-term impacts. His tenure initiated promising reforms in higher education, aiming to liberalize students and academia. All this has been lost with the collapse of the PH government only after 22 months in power.

It was explained in the second part of the book that an intellectual environment needs to be created in our universities (Chapter 13 specifically). Intellectual discourse must be encouraged among both students and faculty. Can you explain more about what an intellectual discourse should be like? Besides personal interests such as money, administrative positions, and fame, are there any other factors that might prevent more intellectual discourse from happening in our universities?

My experience shapes my view of "quality education," emphasizing curiosity, reading, public debate, and asking probing questions. This creates an intellectual environment that fosters public intellectuals and a scholarly community. While in Manhattan as a graduate student at Columbia University in the 1980s and 1990s, the city exemplified these qualities. Public transport riders were engaged in reading, and on campus, students and lecturers gathered in open spaces for discussions, debates, and curiosity-driven conversations. There was a vibe of curiosity, questioning, probing, wanting to know more.

We lack such values in Malaysian university life, in society in general. This is because it is not encouraged in schools, to begin with. Similarly, in the universities in Malaysia, the reality on the ground is partly fear. Students and lecturers feel inhibited to freely express controversial views or ask provocative questions. A majority are also overcome by apathy. The reality is that over the decades many academicians have also become lazy and "seat warmers", partly due to oppressive policies (such as AUKU and Act 605)



which suppress intellectual creativity. The desire to be promoted quickly is another reason. When lecturers have this attitude, it is difficult for students to be otherwise. They get no encouragement from their mentors.

I'd like to say a little more about the "fear" factor. It is the fear of facing disciplinary action by the HOD, the Dean, or the Chancellor; fear of being put in cold storage for being too critical or controversial, or asking probing questions; the fear of NOT being promoted. From a lecturer's perspective, Act 605 (Statutory Bodies, Discipline and Surcharge Act) has resulted in "intellectual inertia", or scholarly apathy.

The book mentioned that Malaysian academics have largely failed in their responsibility as social change agents (Chapter 18: page 99 & 102). Can you provide more explanation on the role of an academic as a social change agent? What are the differences between academic responsibility and social responsibility?

I do not think there should be a mental separation between "academic" and "social" responsibility. In my mind, the two are integral. Historically, universities prioritized teaching over research until the Scientific Revolution introduced research in the 16th - 17th centuries. The Industrial Revolution in the 19th century increased research's importance. During the peak of colonial expansion in the 19th century, universities aligned with the corporate, military, and bureaucratic sectors to support extractive colonialism. Post-WWII, teaching and research evolved to serve the nation's technical and industrial needs.

Post-colonial countries like Malaysia have witnessed a shift where teaching in universities has become less esteemed compared to research. This change is tied to globalization, the global economy's liberalization, corporatization of higher education, and the university ranking system, which I critique. Professors increasingly prioritize job preparation over nurturing students' humanity, focusing on creating human capital. Universities today rarely run critical courses that engage in tough conceptual debates around hypothetical scenarios that predict the future of humanity, or simply about "life" or "living". The emphasis on vocational skills in universities duplicates the role of vocational institutions, missing out on critical conceptual debates or exploring the essence of life.

General education, as my late father, Professor Syed Hussein Alatas, highlighted, should focus on preparing society for life rather than just for livelihoods. In my opinion, academics need to extend beyond their campus roles; they should become public intellectuals and engage in scholar activism to shape the nation's future. I strongly advocate for this transformation and have actively spoken and written about it. Unfortunately, in Malaysia, scholar activism is neglected, partly due to restrictive laws like AUKU & Act 605.

Today, most lecturers do not publicly speak or write about their concerns about the nation, either on campus or in the media. We don't have a culture that nurtures public intellectuals and rigorous public discourse, partly because of the larger political structure and culture of the country. However, it was not always this way, so there is a chance we can revert to an earlier era



when campuses were fertile grounds for developing the country's intellectuals. Most lecturers do not form scholarly associations on campus, that speak up against state-sanctioned impositions on academic freedom. Also, lecturers as a group are rarely outraged if a book or scholar is banned from campus. In general, there is widespread "indifference", and "silence", and apathy to connect with the larger society.

Throughout your book, you have mentioned the importance of humanities, history, and philosophy to be re-emphasized in our education system. Can you explain how these subjects help to build a framework for critical thinking for STEM students? Will the introduction of the course Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (PPE) Programme in public universities be one of the solutions for this issue?

Philosophy is an activity of thought. It is not merely passive appreciation. In other words, philosophy (and all the humanities) can be "practiced" and not merely "thought". Philosophy or music, art, poetry can teach any STEM student to *understand* through logical connections. This is the purpose of the humanities and social sciences, and the meaning of critical thinking.

The emphasis on engineering and computer sciences in university education has marginalized the humanities. While science provides facts, Malaysia's critical stage in nation-building is due to neglecting history, philosophy, and the study of different civilizations, hindering dialogue and understanding amid differences. Science will never be able to tell us whether it is

moral to use a certain type of information for discriminatory purposes, or not. It just presents the facts of that information. The humanities like religion and the social sciences like sociology teaches us why we shouldn't use certain information because of its long term effects on human interactions, the possible violence to societies, and the disruption to the quality of their lives.

The global ranking exercise highlighted in your book is commonly practiced among universities in the world (Chapters 25 & 28). Such a system has resulted in the lack of academic freedom and the commercialization of universities, as you explained in Malaysia's case. But what alternatives are there? How should universities be evaluated instead?

In general, while we can continue to pursue the Global Ranking Exercises, at the same time we should also oppose its excessive corporate capitalist forms. A collective withdrawal from rankings is proposed, emphasizing universities' unique strengths, and nurturing diverse expertise. Embracing community learning, focusing on quality over quantity in publications, and rethinking the purpose of education can revitalize higher education. Malaysian universities need a dual strategy: firstly, to critique and reform their own systems while strategizing alternatives to GURs. Reformation is essential as the current system stifles academic freedom, discourages discourse, and hampers critical thinking. By introspecting and seeking alternatives, Malaysian universities can make a



dignified exit from exploitative practices. Please refer to these articles that I have written.¹

You have highlighted issues at different levels: the leadership level, the societal perceptions, and our higher education system, and how each layer of these is interconnected with each other in terms of reform implementation and responses. In your view, with Malaysia's current political landscape becoming more fragmented with various political parties promoting different ideologies, do you think this presents an opportunity or a risk to addressing the issues you've highlighted in your book?

I suppose my book has highlighted a range of problems that I perceive about the country. Malaysians have experienced the potency of social power and democracy through voting, signaling the potential for reform. Learning from past mistakes, like the collapse of PH, is crucial. We should aim for a new breed of politicians with ethical values and a sense of shame. Over time, I hope to see the removal of the entrenched feudal mentality from our education system and governance. This will not happen without a revamp of our education system. And we cannot revamp anything unless we have a community of intellectuals and concerned scholar activists who are familiar with our history, our long tradition of feudal culture, and make the link of what can be adopted from the past, and what needs to be discarded. This is not

¹ The three articles published in December 2023 as per suggested by the author are:

<https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/opinion/2023/12/14/radicalising-the-debate-on-global-university-rankings/>

<https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/opinion/2023/12/16/global-university-rankings-a-form-of-symbolic-violence/>

an easy task. It will take generations. But I am committed to keep the conversation going and to work towards this. Hence, the publication of this book.

One positive development over the years is the fact that our civil society is maturing fast. More individuals are participating in meaningful debates, and discussing corruption which they finally realise is the root cause of most of our problems. I have hope for the country despite my pessimism throughout the book.

[6/global-university-rankings-a-form-of-symbolic-violence/](https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/opinion/2023/12/18/alternatives-to-global-university-rankings/)

<https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/opinion/2023/12/18/alternatives-to-global-university-rankings/>



Fieldnotes

LEPROSY HERITAGE MAKING - AN ONGOING CONVERSATION ON DIFFICULT PAST AND DARK HISTORY*

Por Heong Hong

Universiti Sains Malaysia

The movement of making Sungai Buloh Leprosy Settlement (SBLS) (Photo 1) a national as well as world heritage started as early as 2006. After twelve years of collective efforts, the place was listed in the UNESCO World Heritage tentative list in 2018. Placed in the broader context of Malaysia's cultural heritage movements, which often reflect the wider societal and political concerns, Sungai Buloh stands out as a unique case. Unlike other heritage sites, SBLS is associated with a specific disease, a socially stigmatized and marginalized community, and a complex history of colonial medicine.

While the SBLS heritage movement is a locally driven bottom-up initiative with its own trajectory, it shares similarities and connections with the leprosy heritage movements in Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. Historically, Japan is a pioneer in leprosy heritage movement. In 2001, a landmark court ruling in Japan declared the isolation policy unconstitutional, leading to public apology from the Japanese government and parliament to the survivors of Hansen's disease who were victims of compulsory segregation. This landmark judgement played a

crucial role in inspiring similar actions in Taiwan and South Korea, where leprosy heritage movements soon emerged, albeit with different trajectories. These developments are closely linked to the democratization of East Asian societies, which also manifests in the diverse perspectives in knowledge production, cultural movements, and deep reflections on issues related to patient rights, destigmatization of leprosy and state power.



Sekolah Harapan in the Sungai Buloh Leprosy Settlements

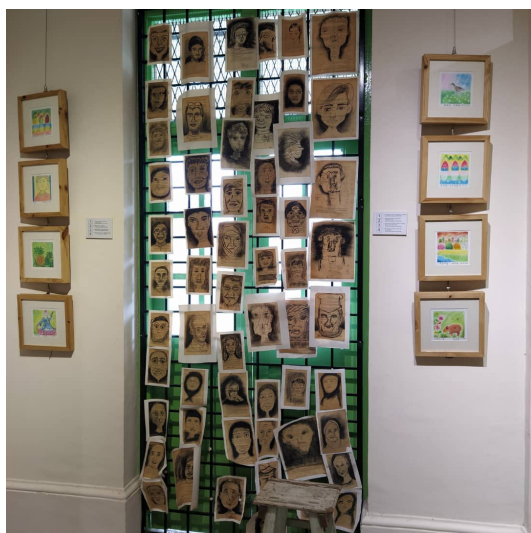
* This article is a field reflection on a research project on comparative studies of leprosy heritage making movement in

Taiwan, South Korea and Malaysia, sponsored by Taiwan's Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation.





Valley of Hope Story Gallery in the Sungai Buloh Leprosy Control Center



Inside view of one of the galleries in the Sungai Buloh Leprosy Settlement

In comparison to East Asian countries, the SBLS preservation movement began a few years later, primarily sparked by several events. In 2006, Joyce Wong Chau Yin and her friend Phang Siew Sia, co-authored a book, titled “Valley of Hope: Sungai Buloh National Leprosy Control Center,” documenting the lives, emotions, and memories of Hansen’s disease survivors in Sungai Buloh

Leprosarium. Joyce Wong grew up in SBLS. Both her parents were leprosy survivors, she inherits, shares and carries the memories and emotions of the residents in the place.

Later that year, a family member of SBLS resident called up news reporters to inform them about severe damages on the tombstones in SBLS cemetery caused by nurseries and asked the TV station to make a report of the case. The reported incident caught the attention of some, especially heritage activists who were interested in preserving cemetery. These activists conducted field surveys and mapping at SBLS to document historical information inscribed on the tombstones.

In 2007, Lim Yong Long, an architectural scholar who wrote a doctoral thesis on the built environment and architectural history of SBLS, penned an article to call for the preservation of SBLS as a national heritage. Lim argued that SBLS met the heritage standards of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the National Heritage Act of 2005.

Meanwhile, the National Heritage Act, which was passed in 2005, is a sign of rising awareness among certain segment of the society. Around the same time, various old buildings in Klang Valley faced demolition, as a result of development and urban renewal. For example, the demolition of Bok House near the Twin Towers in Ampang, which caught the attention of many at the end of 2006.

The abovementioned incidents and trends served as backdrop and catalysts for SBLS heritage preservation movement. Subsequently,



the "Save Valley of Hope Solidarity Group" was established in 2007. By the end of 2008, several activists, who were active in the Losheng Sanatorium preservation movement in Taiwan, visited SBLS to share and exchange experiences with SBLS residents and show their support to the preservation movement. Their visit to SBLS marks the first move of regional connection for leprosy heritage movement. Later, Japan's Sasakawa Foundation sponsored an oral history project. Over the past few years, leprosy heritage preservation enthusiasts and scholars from South Korea also visited Sungai Buloh, further expanding the regional connections of leprosy heritage movement.

While regional connections facilitate mutual inspiration and learning, SBLS heritage movement, in contrast to the leprosy heritage movements in East Asia, remains relatively moderate. It has not adopted a confrontational approach like its counterparts in East Asia, the latter has more profound reflections on state power, doctor-patient power relations and stigmatization. On the contrary, the overall discourse of the SBLS movement has instead inherited a colonial perspective, viewing the SBLS as a legacy of colonial "benevolence." This approach even uncritically appropriates the self-glorifying slogans of the colonial authority, which claim that "SBLS is the second-largest leprosarium in the world" and "a leprosarium without barbed wires or high walls, and more like a home away from home"¹.

¹ According to the oral histories of SBLS residents, before the 1980s, SBLS had three layers of fence and checkpoint, each of which was guarded by security guards. News reports from the colonial period claim that SBLS was "without highwall or barbed wire" because there were voices against setting up a central institution for the mandatory segregation of leprosy patients as an

Some leprosy heritage enthusiasts even argue that "British colonization differs from Japanese colonization", the former was "more humane" than the latter, thus justifying SBLS heritage as a symbol of "benevolence" of the colonial authority. This historical interpretation cannot be dissociated from the wider context of Malaysia's political development. As a post-colonial nation that has never undergone thorough decolonization, Malaysia as a whole inherits the paternalist model of colonial governance. It is thus not uncommon that people interpret the colonial past without critical examination of colonial voices and perspectives in the colonial archives and past newspaper reports. Clearly, the afterlife of colonialism lives on some activists' interpretation of the SBLS history. This may also be a manifestation of dissatisfaction with the current Malay dominated ethnocentric regime through romanticizing, consciously or otherwise, the colonial past to make a contrast with the present regime.

In 2011, former mandarin TV news presenter Tan Ean Nee founded Care & Share Circle, a charity group which uses SBLS as its base of activities. Under her leadership, the organization recorded oral histories of many SBLS residents, raised funds, and established the "Valley of Hope Story Gallery" in 2018. After the gallery's establishment, the discourses about SBLS heritage underwent a transformation, shifting

inhumane policy. The "no barbed wire" statement was a propaganda to ease opposition voices, rather than a historical fact.



away from a focus on architecture and the built environment to center on the life stories of SBLS residents instead, including the hardships the survivors endured and their collective triumph over the disease. The difficult and dark past of the leprosarium is now presented through a *positive and triumphalist* narrative (The Sungai Buloh Settlement Council — ECHOES FROM THE VALLEY OF HOPE). Meanwhile, discussions on public health measures and state power still adhere to earlier narratives, emphasizing SBLS as a legacy of colonial “benevolence.” It is a purified and whitewashed narrative that excludes contradictory messages and dark aspects of SBLS. This whitewashed narrative can possibly be understood as a strong yearning for humanitarianism, rather than a deliberate distortion of history.

In addition to the non-confrontational approach and positive narrative, the main actors in the SBLS heritage movement are also different from those in East Asia. Whether it is the Save Valley of Hope Solidarity Group or the Care & Share Circle, the members are all outsiders, instead of SBLS residents or survivors of Hansen’s disease. By contrast, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan all have strong survivors’ organizations, who stand at the forefront of the movement for their own political and legal rights. Outsiders who show their support are often more conscious of restraining themselves from *speaking for* the survivors. Even though there are just as many internal disputes and differences in the heritage preservation movement in East Asia, the outsider activists in the heritage movement are capable to reflect on issues of state powers, the power relations between outsider activists and SBLS residents, and the diverse and competing

narratives of history and heritage. The limitation of SBLS leprosy heritage movement is but a microcosm of Malaysia. Nonetheless, it is a significant social and political process whereby all actors engage in conversations on heritage making and collective social learning, unlearning and relearning of the multiple aspects of history and heritage.

In other words, leprosy heritage movement is not simply about commemorating the past. It involves how contemporary people view, (re)interpret, make sense of and relate to the past. Specialist communities like historians are not the only ones involved in (re)interpretation and making sense of historical events; the broader society, including heritage activists, are also involved in examining their relations with the past. It is a process which reflects how a society views, (re)interprets and understands its own history. The latter is often restricted by various societal conditions. Democratic societies often have more space to engage in critical dialogue on difficult histories than undemocratized authoritarian societies. In practice, heritage making involves multifaceted issues: Why preserve? Preserve what? Preserve for whom and for what? Who gets to define what is or is not worth preserving? The heritage is to be managed by whom? How to manage? It is a process which involves multi-layered and complex power relations and competing narratives. As a social movement, leprosy heritage movement should be a collective learning process through which all actors and participants, whether survivors or outsiders, can unlearn and relearn history, society and the mechanisms of power, and become actors capable of questioning history and power,



instead of treating the survivors merely as “persons worthy of sympathy” or “marginalized others”.

As pointed out by past studies on the history of medicine and tropical diseases, leprosarium was a theatre of inter-empire competition in the early twentieth century. The treatment of leprosy was an arena where scientists in tropical medicine competed for research funding to establish their own authority and career. A century later, leprosy heritage making has paradoxically become a ground for international competition among East and Southeast Asian countries to compete for UNESCO world heritage status. How to transcend the narrow perspective of national pride and international competition and make leprosy heritage movement a site for critical reflections, conversations that encompass diverse and competing narratives, and education on democracy and disease de-stigmatization, is a task that calls for the attention and consideration of heritage activists. The recent COVID-19 pandemic reminds us that anyone can become the next target of social stigmatization and popular anger due to collective fear. The importance of the leprosy heritage movement should not be limited to merely reflecting on the history of one disease, but rather an opportunity to learn how power operates and the broader issues of social stigmatization.

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Biographical Note

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Publications of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society

By Dr Paul Kratoska, Hon. Editor, MBRAS

As members of the MSB Study Group will know, the *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* (JMBRAS) is an extraordinary resource for anyone seeking information on Malaysia, Singapore, or Brunei. The tables of contents for the issues published in 2023 are included in the present issue of *Berita*.

The journal dates back to 1878, when the Straits Branch of the RAS put out its inaugural journal; December 2023 was our 325th issue. All JMBRAS and JSBRAS issues are available online. Earlier numbers going back to 1878 are in JSTOR, and more than 89,000 JMBRAS/JSBRAS articles were downloaded through JSTOR in 2023. Digital copies of issues published since 2010 are in university libraries that subscribe to the Project MUSE Premium package of journals (part of Johns Hopkins University Press). NB: University libraries can also subscribe to the digital version of JMBRAS separately for \$70 per year through Project MUSE.

The Society's webpage (<https://www.mbras.org.my/>) has an index to all issues of the journal through 2020. The MBRAS webpage has fallen out of date owing to Covid restrictions and our recent move to a new

office location, but we are developing a new webpage.

In addition to the journal, MBRAS publishes monographs and reprints. *The Malay Keris: Artistry in Iron* and *Jacques de Morgan's Explorations in the Malay Peninsula, 1884* both appeared in 2020. Our most recent publications are *Carl A. Gibson-Hill: Photography, History, Boats, and Birds in Late-Colonial Malaya and Singapore*, by Brendan Luyt (2022), and a small volume by Benjamin J. Q. Khoo and Peter Borschberg entitled *Knowing Singapore: The Evolution of Published Information in Europe, c.1500–1819*, which thoroughly debunks the idea that Singapore was largely unknown in Europe before Raffles and the events of 1819.

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In this issue, Danny Wong Tze Ken discusses the transition in the study of Malaysian history from a focus on the activities of Europeans to an Asian focus, and the recent emergence of amateur historians doing research and publishing online. Anthony Milner considers the timing of conversion to Islam in the Malay Peninsula. F. Andrew Smith details the life of a successful Penang merchant in the early 1800s and gives an idea of the complexity and risk associated with mercantile activity at the time. Bonny Tan's article looks at the life of a young man who began his career as a library clerk in Singapore in 1895 at the age of 16, and at the time of his death from smallpox 20 years later was a translator and librarian for the President of the Chinese Republic. In 'Constructing Colonial Benevolence', Por Heong Hong considers the significance of photographs of leprosy patients in colonial Malaya. Finally, Jonathan Chan examines the way three novelists (Jin Zhimang, Anthony Burgess, and Han Suyin) who witnessed the Malayan Emergency first hand dealt with the conflict in their works of fiction.

The cover illustration comes from a new publication in the MBRAS Monograph series. *Knowing Singapore: The Evolution of Published Information in Europe, c.1500–1819*, by Benjamin Khoo and Peter Borschberg, explores the numerous references to Singapore in European publications between the sixteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and how European understandings of the region changed during this period. The book conclusively puts to rest the idea that Singapore was an obscure location with no history before the British East India Company created a trading station on the island in 1819.

Paul Kratoska
Hon. Editor, JMBRAS

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Editor's Note

Several articles in the current issue of JMBRAS revolve around Johor, Singapore, and the Riau Archipelago, the chain of islands immediately to the south of Singapore. The opening essay concerns the authorship of the *Sejarah Melayu* or *Malay Annals*, and the role played by Raja Bongsu, sometime ruler of Johor. Khoo Chun Yok examines the collapse of the trading entrepôt at Riau in 1784, arguing that Singapore attracted traders because it provided the facilities and services formerly available from Riau. F. Andrew Smith examines the trading environment of the late 18th and early 19th centuries through an examination of the careers of three brothers involved in various ways with maritime activities in the region. An article published in 1821 and reprinted here provides further insight into the trading environment of the time, specifically relations between the private 'country traders' that operated out of ports like Singapore and the British East India Company. Rounding out this issue are articles by Brendan Luyt, who examines Singapore's highly competitive printing industry prior to WWII, and Loh Wei Leng, whose inaugural professorial lecture offers an overview of issues addressed by historians in Malaysia in the early twenty-first century.

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