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許維賢

REMAPPING THE SINOPHONE

The Cultural Production of Chinese-Language Cinema in
Singapore and Malaya before and during the Cold War

Wai-Siam Hee

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Cover photo [top]: Malayan Communist Party guerrilla Hong Mui robs a Malay shaman in *Kampong Sentosa*. Courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, US.

Cover photo [bottom]: *Kampong Sentosa* characters: Malayan Communist Party captain Lau Mah (centre), Malay MCP member (second from right), He Ping (first on right), and Hong Mui (first on left). Courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, US.

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Introduction

1. The Cold War and cultural production by Chinese people in early Singapore and Malaya

- a. *fangyan* is not equal to 'dialect';
- b. Chinese or Sinitic is a group and not a language . . .
- e. Cantonese, Amoy, Hakka, Hunanese, Hainanese, Taiwanese, Dungan, etc. are distinct languages within the Chinese or Sinitic group . . .
- g. 'Mandarin' is not synonymous with 'the Chinese language' (Mair 1991, 12–13)

In 1938, Republican-era linguist Chao Yuen Ren (2002a, 486) argued that 'China has a unified script; its *fangyan* (topolects/dialects) are divergent. This is a fact known to all'. This well-known summation of Chinese scripts and *fangyan* has in recent years been cited by Ng Kim Chew (2018) to attack Shih Shu-mei's Sinophone discourse, which ' "upgrades" *fangyan* to *huayu* (Chinese language)'. First, we must remind ourselves that Chao Yuen Ren's argument was made in Republican era historical context, in which the global cultural Cold War was yet to take place; Ng Kim Chew should thus not distort his words into a type of 'common knowledge' hegemony to try and imply that the Chinese script has always been unified, and that Chinese dialects have also always shared the same unified Chinese script. U.S. Sinologist and professor of Chinese at the University of Pennsylvania Victor H. Mair (1991, 7) argues that 'it is false (or at least dangerously misleading) to claim that all the Chinese "dialects" share the same written language' (7), and observes that 'the vast majority of Chinese languages have never received a written form, Mandarin, Fuchow, Cantonese, Shanghai, Suchow, and the other major *fangyan* do not share the same written language. I have seen scattered materials written in these different Chinese *fangyan*, both in tetragraphs and in romanised transcription, and it is safe to say that they barely resemble each other at all'(7). According to him, many of these *fangyan* of Sinitic languages are not only mutually unintelligible in their spoken form, but also their written form. Therefore, he holds firmly to the view that Chinese *fangyan* are more properly viewed as different Sinitic languages, and not as dialects of Chinese.

This being the case, he proposes the adoption of ‘topolect’ as an exact, neutral translation of *fangyan* instead of ‘dialect’, and points out that ‘the abuse of the word *fangyan* in its incorrect English as “dialect” has led to extensive misinformation concerning Chinese language(s) in the West’ (1-6). One consequence of such misinformation is the tendency to view Mandarin as a single Chinese language, and *fangyan* as subdivisions of it. Such misinformation has also been retransmitted from the West back to China, and to Chinese overseas. A recent example of this is Ng Kim Chew’s (2018) accusation that Shih Shu-mei’s ‘upgrading’ of *fangyan* into ‘heterogenous Chinese languages (*duozhong huayu*)’ lacks any academic basis. Actually, Chao Yuen Ren (2002b, 82) himself, in a 1959 lecture at National Taiwan University, accepted that ‘*fangyan* in the broad sense of the term refers to fundamentally different languages’. Ng Kim Chew’s refusal to move on from the narrow, Republican-era understanding of Chinese script and topolects resulted in his inability to see the theory of ‘heterogeneous Chinese languages’ as practiced by Chinese people in Singapore and Malaya during the Cold War.

This book intends to take a cultural approach to tracing the theory of heterogeneous Chinese languages as it appears in Chinese-language cinema and publications in Singapore and Malaya, treating the phenomenon with the importance it warrants. The theory was particularly prevalent in the context surrounding Singaporean and Malayan independence in the Cold War. The 1950s was a tense period in the standoff between the Chinese Communists and Nationalists across the Taiwan Straits. The movement towards simplified Chinese characters promoted aggressively by the Communist government in Mainland China contrasted with the traditional full form characters used by the Nationalists in Taiwan, creating a conflict between simplified and full form scripts that persists to this day. This shows that from the mid 20th century onwards, the Chinese script was no longer as unified as it had been in the era of Classical Chinese, or even the Republican period. We should not continue to consider Chinese script and topolects from the perspectives of the Republican era; instead, Sinophone theory, with its focus on adapting to different temporal and spatial contexts, is a far more flexible framework with which to consider such issues.

The Chinese people of Singapore and Malaya proposed the theory of heterogeneous Chinese languages in the same era that relations between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Kuomintang (KMT) broke down. This era was also one in which Mainland Chinese *putonghua* (with its simplified script) and Taiwanese *guoyu* (with its full-form script) were in fierce competition, and Chinese topolects flowed unhindered: it was a golden age of Singaporean and Malayan cinema. As China rises as a superpower in the 21st century, China-centric discourses on ‘Overseas Chinese and Chinese People’ (*huaqiao huaren*) and the ‘China model’ (*zhongguo moshi*) have proliferated, entering into a global struggle for cultural hegemony with the US-centric discourses that have monopolised intellectual life for so long. The subjectivity of Singaporean and Malaysian Chinese culture, the

product of marginalised inhabitants of small countries, is prone to being covered up by imperialist discourses and forgotten. Researching the multinational and translocal early Singaporean and Malayan film culture helps us to re-draw the map of this forgotten corner of the Sinophone, and to understand how the Chinese culture of that era represented the ‘multilinguality of sound and script’ (Shih 2011, 715).

This book defines early Chinese-language cinema in Singapore and Malaya as films in Mandarin and Chinese topolects produced and distributed in Singapore and Malaya and primarily starring local actors, or local moving images which combine various Chinese topolects and the languages of other ethnicities, such as narrative feature films or documentaries.¹ Early Singaporean and Malayan film from 1927 to 1965 can be divided into two production categories (see Appendix for details). The first is films in local Mandarin and Chinese topolects directed by Chinese people and produced in Singapore and Malaya. Currently, twenty-six such films have been identified.² The second is films made by foreign or colonial directors incorporating dialogue in Mandarin and Chinese topolects, or which come in a Chinese version. A large number of these were produced in Singapore and Malaya during the Cold War era. A further category comprises Mandarin and Chinese topolect films which were filmed in S.E. Asia or adapted from Singaporean and Malayan literary works but produced and released in Hong Kong. These are commonly seen as Hong Kong films and so lie outside the scope of this work.³ Early Singaporean and Malayan Chinese-language films are sometimes mentioned briefly in works published by the Hong Kong Film Archive, but they are usually ignored. Existing histories of film in Singapore and Malaysia generally focus on Malay films and post-1990 national films. Even if some sections of these works mention early Chinese-language film, there are many errors in their materials and arguments (see Chapter 1 for details). Early Singaporean and Malayan Chinese-language film is particularly marginalised and/or ignored in mainstream histories of film in Singapore or Malaysia. These histories, guided by national cinema theory, presuppose and rationalise the post-Cold War centrality of the nation-state, in which Malay culture plays a hegemonic role.

1. When the term ‘Chinese-language cinema’ is used in this book, it is equivalent to the Chinese *huayu dianying*. In this book, ‘Singaporean and Malayan cinema’ in the narrow sense does not include foreign language films such as those completely in English. Before *New Friend*, a group of Westerners of indeterminate nationality led by producer Charles S. Kitts founded and registered the Oriental Film Company (“Singapore Film Comedies” 1920, 9). They produced a comedy short in English entitled *A Practical Joke*, which had a preview screening in Singapore in 1921. This silent film was filmed locally. The producer and his wife acted in the film, and a Chinese *Peranakan* named Ngee Yong played a supporting role (“Singapore’s First Film Play” 1921, 5).
2. The first category is laid out well in Xu Yongshun’s 2015 work, but, sadly, there is a lack of in-depth analysis and exposition.
3. Scholars such as Stephen Teo (2006), Yung Sai-shing (2012) and E. K. Tan (2010) have studied the interactions between these Hong Kong films and S.E. Asia in depth. In addition, Grace Mak’s (2009) PhD thesis features comprehensive research into this topic. At the time, most funding for these films came from S.E. Asian Chinese businesspeople. In addition, they were mainly oriented towards the S.E. Asian Chinese market, and not purely Hong Kong films. Therefore, there is no issue in categorising them as early Singaporean and Malayan Chinese-language films in the broad sense of the term. These films, which do not belong completely to either Hong Kong or Singapore and Malaya, could perhaps be best described as Chinese diasporic cinema (Chu Yingchi 2003, 22–41).

The culture of other ethnicities is only viewed as ethnic minority culture and is included in a limited way, providing it supports national harmony and ethnic unity.

This research takes a perspective other than that of national cinema theory to rewrite the early history of Singaporean and Malayan Chinese-language cinemas, which has been neglected by local academics. It also remedies the subject's omission from histories of world cinema, Asian cinema and S.E. Asian cinema. Rather than ask to what extent early Singaporean and Malayan Chinese-language cinema constructed a popular memory, it is more fruitful to examine what type of cultural production led people to forget about these films. To answer this question, we must trace and examine their historical context before and during the Cold War. This was not only a period in which left- and right-wing ideologies were clashing in S.E. Asia but also marked a turning point in which Singaporean and Malayan Chinese people began to use the written and spoken Chinese language to take part in localisation. During this period, S.E. Asia was on the frontline of the Anglo-American capitalist bloc's attempts to surround and contain Chinese communism. The origins of the Asian Cold War can even be traced back to Malaya, where the British colonial government announced the Malayan Emergency in 1948, when it 'saw the calculated opening of an Asian front in the wider, international Cold War' (Hack 2009, 473). Overseas Chinese, who made up 6 per cent of the population of S.E. Asia (Skinner 1951, 79; Oyen 2010, 59), were seen by the US and the UK as a minority that threatened the entire region (see Chapter 4 for details). Singaporean and Malayan film studios became an ideological battlefield on which the capitalist and communist camps played out their disagreements before and during the Cold War. The political leanings of Chinese groups also became a frontline that the global Cold War actors had to fight for. Most current research on S.E. Asian Chinese people during the Cold War takes a Western historical and cultural perspective to give a top-down narration of how Western imperialist powers guided political and social change among Chinese communities of the region. There is a lack of research which values non-Western popular culture and popular memory perspectives to perform a bottom-up analysis of the role S.E. Asian Chinese people played in the Cold War and their cultural production. The use of non-Western perspectives to narrate how non-Western actors responded strategically to the global Cold War is an area of research which urgently requires expansion (Szonyi and Liu 2010, 5).

This book examines declassified Cold War archives from the US and the UK government, as well as a huge volume of reportage on local film culture in film tabloids and other Chinese- and English-language publications. These sources are combined and analysed to reveal the Cold War ideologies in early Singaporean and Malayan colonial and Sinophone cinemas, restoring memories of 'Chinese language' and 'Chinese-language cinemas' from early Singapore and Malaya. Research on this historical period is not only vitally important to understanding the cultural production, local consciousness, national identity, and Chinese identity of Chinese people in early Singapore and Malaya but can also enable bidirectional reflections

on the discourses, origins, and difficulties of the localisation of the Chinese language and Singaporean and Malayan Chinese people. Domestic and foreign research on Singaporean and Malaysian literary culture has tended to consider the entanglements of Singaporean and Malayan cultural production, local consciousness, national identity, and Chinese identity from the perspective of text-based Singaporean and Malayan literature; there is a lack of consideration of these issues from a moving image/audiovisual mass media perspective. In the past, the majority of Malayan Chinese society was illiterate and could not nurture local consciousness or national identity through reading Singaporean and Malayan literature. At the time, Chinese-language films with audiovisual moving images in different Chinese topolects could reach their eyes and ears directly: it is probable that for the majority of Singaporean and Malayan Chinese people, this was one of the main channels through which their local consciousness and national identity was gradually awakened.

2. The genealogy of the term ‘Chinese-language cinemas’

The term ‘Chinese-language cinemas’ is already widely used in both Chinese and English language mainstream academia. Most scholars believe that the term and concept was created in the 1990s in Taiwan or Hong Kong.⁴ However, this book overturns this theory, proving that the term and concept were widely current in publications in Singapore and Malaya in the 1950s and 1960s, while local Chinese directors were making Chinese-language films set in Singapore and Malaya. The context in which the term was used in Singapore and Malaya at the time was almost identical to the way in which it is used today. Right from the start, it was a plural concept, including films in Chinese from mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other Chinese-speaking areas. It also included films in all Chinese topolects. The ‘multilingual Chinese-language’ promoted by Singaporean and Malayan ‘Chinese-language cinemas’ at this time not only prefigured the ‘Chinese-language cinemas’ promoted by Sheldon H. Lu and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh in the 21st century but also corresponds with the multilinguality of sound and script emphasised in Shih Shu-mei’s concept of Sinophone theory (Shih 2011, 715). This provides a historical dimension to our present attempts to deepen the current concept of Sinophone cinema and redraw the frontiers of the Sinophone.

First, we must clarify that there is a divergence between the way that modern linguistics scholars define the term ‘Chinese language’ (*huayu*) and how cultural researchers and Chinese-language cinema scholars define it. Linguistics experts tend to define ‘Chinese language’ as ‘the common language of the Chinese people, with modern Putonghua being the standard’ (Guo 2012, 12–13). In this definition,

4. For analysis of advocacy of the concept of Chinese-language cinema in Hong Kong and Taiwan, see the introduction of my book focusing on contemporary Malaysian Chinese-language film (Hee 2018, 33–36).

the 'Chinese language' is a standard official language, not including any Chinese topolects. I refer to this concept as 'homogeneous Chinese' (*yiyuan huayu*). However, in cultural studies and Chinese-language cinema studies, the term includes standard Mandarin alongside Chinese topolects. Here, I borrow the term used by the Singaporean and Malayan director Yi Shui (1959, 33): 'heterogeneous Chinese languages' (*duozhong huayu*). When Sheldon H. Lu theorised the concept of Chinese-language cinema, he interprets 'Chinese language' as meaning 'multi-lingual Chinese languages', covering standard Mandarin and topolects. He defines Chinese-language cinema as films made in mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macao in Chinese languages (Mandarin, topolects, and ethnic minority languages). It also includes films made in Chinese languages from across the globe (Lu 2014a, 6). This broader concept of Chinese-language film has gradually become a consensus term in the US, China, and Europe over the last twenty years but has also provoked criticism. North American scholars strongly criticise 'Chinese-language cinema' discourse as being China-centrism in disguise: not only does it fail to deconstruct ideas of China and China-centrism but places the diverse locations of China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong into an indivisible Chinese empire (Wada-Marciano 2012, 100). In recent years, Chinese scholars in mainland China have also criticised 'Chinese-language cinema' discourse for being a product of Western humanities disciplines and thus tainted with the suspicion of US-centrism. They also criticise the term for being a fundamentally political concept, without a historical dimension to its origins and development (Li 2014, 53).

In recent years, debate on 'Chinese-language cinema' in Western and Chinese academia has fallen into mutual accusations of 'US-centrism' and 'China-centrism'. This polarised debate originates from two interpretations of Chinese-language cinema. The first can be termed 'centripetal' Chinese-language cinema discourse and is particularly in vogue in mainland China. This school of thought often has Chinese nationalist tendencies and unconsciously uses nationality, state, and borders as a starting point to consider the political function of Chinese-language cinema. Mainland Chinese scholars have admitted that discourse about the concept of 'Chinese-language cinema' in the country, no matter whether the scholar is opposed, supportive, or neutral, 'all has a common focus, that is a desire to give the cinemas of Mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan an overall formal name, and a concern to maintain the integrity, homogeneity, and independence of "Chinese cinema" (*zhongguo dianying*)' (Chen Xihe and Liu Yuqing 2008, 87). Therefore scholars in this group tend to highlight the 'homogeneous Chinese' aspect of Chinese-language cinema and downplay the role that Chinese topolects play in film narrative. The second interpretation is the 'centrifugal' Chinese-language cinema discourse more popular among scholars in English-language academia. Such scholars tend to research Chinese-language cinema from the starting point of culture and language, carrying out transregional, trans-national, diverse, coterminous research (Lu 2014a, 5). Yet this group has been criticised for 'always returning to

politics in a way that appears to supersede politics' (Chen Xuguang et al. 2015, 78). Scholars in this group tend to highlight the 'heterogeneous Chinese' aspect of Chinese-language cinema and downplay or criticise the role of 'homogeneous Chinese' in film narrative.

The two above-mentioned interpretations of the terms 'Chinese language' and 'Chinese-language cinema' have resulted in the long-running disagreements between centrifugal and centripetal Chinese-language cinema discourses which I term the 'Chinese-language discourse structure'. Virtually all disagreements play out within this structure; 'US-centrism' and 'China-centrism' are two of the flash-points for debate. These two ideologies are commonly expressed in international political discourse as the 'Chinese Dream' and the 'American Dream'. Centring these two countries creates dichotomous oppositions between East and West in the field of discourse, excluding the original history and memories of the terms 'Chinese language' and 'Chinese-language cinema' among Sinophone communities outside the US and China. All too often, as these Sinophone communities are neither in China nor the West, they are assumed to be 'nowhere', a fate suffered by Singaporean and Malaysian Sinophone communities for many years.

When Li Daoxin criticised Chinese-language cinema discourse for containing 'US-centrism', Sheldon H. Lu wrote an article to rebut this: 'The concept of Chinese-language cinema was first proposed in Chinese-language academia in Taiwan, and now it has been broadly expanded on in Chinese-language academia in Mainland China; it has nothing to do with US-centrism' (Lu 2014b, 28). Whether 'Chinese-language cinema' is 'China-centric' or 'US-centric', these back-and-forth debates obscure the context of the historical origins and development of the concept outside the US and China.⁵

The long-term focus of scholars in the US, Europe, and Greater China has been on China's (assumed to be the centre) interactions and negotiations with Taiwan and Hong Kong. It seems that it is difficult for any theory that the origin of Chinese-language cinema may lie outside the China-Hong Kong-Taiwan context to gain attention. Recently, the idea that the term 'Chinese-language cinema' was first coined by academics in Hong Kong and Taiwan has become accepted as fact and placed in the 'archive' of the 'Chinese-language discourse structure'. This 'archive' continues to mature, in between the 'Chinese Dream' and the 'American Dream'. The dreamers fixate on either one dream or the other. Dreams are the dreamer's

5. In 2016 I provided Professor Sheldon Lu with evidence that the concept originated in Singaporean and Malayan publications from the 1950s. He responded that 'to trace the naming of the concept "Chinese-language cinema" to its origins, it was actually used earlier in Singapore and Malaya. Everyone should pay attention to this fact' (Lu and Hee 2017, 65). Chinese people in Singapore and Malaya used the term more widely before those in mainland China or Taiwan did and took the first steps towards conceptualising it. I searched for the term in a full text database of Republican-era periodicals and found only two results, in a short news item from 1936 ("Cultural News" 1936, 81) and a report from 1943 ("US State Department Making" 1943, 28). This demonstrates that the term was not widely used in Republican China and was mainly used to refer to films made outside of China which related to China, had Chinese-language audio, or had Chinese subtitles.

replacement of original elements according to their own rules (Derrida 1978, 209). Therefore, this 'archive' does not aspire to faithfully record original memories but rather misplaces them: 'archive' becomes understood as 'is not only the place for stocking and for conserving an archivable content of the past which would exist in any case, such as, without the archive, one still believes it was or will have been' (Derrida 1996, 16–17). This situation not only does not allow anyone from outside China-Hong Kong-Taiwan or the West to get a word in edgeways but automatically erases or rewrites the original memories of Chinese-language cinema.

Li Daoxin has criticised the concept of Chinese-language cinema for lacking a historical dimension. In 2015, he realised that it was not correct to date the birth of the concept to the early 1990s, and so he searched through Hong Kong magazines and newspapers from the 1960s and '70s, finding uses of 'Chinese language' and 'Chinese-language cinema'. He therefore concluded that 'the concept of Chinese-language cinema can only be traced to 1960s/70s Hong Kong at the earliest' (Lü Xinyu et al. 2015, 49). In fact, these terms were frequently found in earlier Chinese periodicals in Singapore and Malaya from the 1950s and '60s. For example, page 6 of the *Nanyang Siang Pau* of 4 June 1959 contains the sentence, 'and as for the announcing in the Chinese language (*huayu*), this party has announcers who can speak Cantonese, Hokkien, Teochewese, Qiongzhouese, and Mandarin' ("Broadcast Vehicles" 1959, 6). Here, 'Chinese language' clearly covers both Mandarin and topolects. Another example dating from 1957, also in the *Nanyang Siang Pau*, is an opinion article entitled 'The Problems of the Chinese Language in Singapore and Malaya'. This mentions that Malay people believe that there many types of Chinese-language (*huayu*) and lists the languages they classify as Chinese, including 'Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochewese, and Qiongzhouese'. The article goes on to describe the languages used by Chinese people as 'very complicated' and hard to choose between (Huanle 1957, 16). This shows that even people outside the Chinese community believed that the term 'Chinese language' referred to more than one language, with no one standard. These examples are cast-iron proof of the history of the concept of 'heterogeneous Chinese' in Singapore and Malaya, which does not equate to the contemporary mainland Chinese idea of a 'homogeneous Chinese' with modern Mandarin as the standard.

In the 1950s and '60s, there were frequent interactions between print media in Singapore and Malaya and Hong Kong. It is probable that the words 'Chinese language' and 'Chinese-language cinema' began to be used in the Hong Kong media in the 1960s and '70s due to this Singaporean and Malayan influence. The term '*huayu*' can be used in a broad sense or a narrow sense. The broad sense is 'the languages used by Chinese people in Singapore and Malaysia. In addition to Mandarin, it also includes all topolects used by Chinese groups' (Yang 1990, 479).⁶ The narrow

6. For example, the Chinese-Malay dictionary revised and reprinted by Li Qinghui in Singapore in 1883 was entitled *Hua-Yi Tongyu*. The character *hua* in the title refers to Hokkien (Minnan). The original title of the book was *Tongyi Xinyu* and was written and edited by Singapore native Lin Hengnan in 1877. He used

sense means ‘a lingua franca spoken by Chinese people, called *putonghua* (Standard Chinese) or *hanyu* (Han language) by Chinese people, not including topolects’. Influenced by the Singaporean and Malaysian ‘Speak Mandarin Campaign’, which advocates ‘speaking Mandarin (*huayu*) more and topolects less’, the former broad sense has been forgotten, replaced by the narrow sense. However, recently Emilie Yueh-Yu Yeh has perceptively observed that ‘Singaporean *huayu* is actually an inclusive concept, covering all languages such as Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka, Chaozhouese, Hainanese, and Mandarin. The term “*huayu*” in itself is a plural and expresses an inclusiveness and a complex linguistic situation’ (Tang and Feng 2011, 73). The ‘Singaporean *huayu*’ that Emilie Yueh-Yu Yeh writes of is actually the ‘heterogeneous Chinese’ of early Singapore and quite different from the ‘homogeneous Chinese’ adopted from the independence of the country in 1965 to the present day, modern Mandarin as the standard.

In order to support the official ‘Speak Mandarin Campaign’, after the 1980s Singaporean linguists working in Chinese language education used various works and lectures to revise the definition of the narrow sense of *huayu*, removing topolects from the definition. One such scholar, famous in China, is Chen Chung-yu. In the 1980s, he began to promote the use of *huayu* as a replacement for terms such as *guoyu*, *hanyu*, and *Putonghua*. His definition of *huayu* excluded topolects, giving no evidence for this position: ‘the term *hanyu* includes all the topolects spoken by Han people, while *huayu* refers only to what we call *guoyu* or *Putonghua*’ (Chen Chung-yu 1993, 4). This obscures the original memory and history of the term ‘*huayu*’ in Singapore and Malaya.

Prior to the 1950s, most of the S.E. Asian film journals, such as *The Amusements Bell* (*Xiaoxian zhong*), *Hai Hsin* (*Hai xing*), and *Marlborough Weekly* (*Manwuluo*) in the 1920s and *The Amusement* (*Yule*) in the 1940s, used terms such as *guochan dianying* (domestically produced films) or *guo pian* (domestic films) to describe films imported from China. Cantonese films from the south of China or Hong Kong were called *yue pian* (Cantonese films). After the 1950s, a subtle change started to appear. Formulations such as *huayu zhong de XX pian* (XX film in the Chinese language), *huayu dianying* (Chinese-language film), or *huayu pian* (Chinese-language film) gradually replaced *guo pian*, *yue pian* and other regional language-based terms for these films. For example, the *Sin Pao* (*Xin bao*) of 21 July 1956 carried an anonymous article on a page dedicated to a ‘movement to oppose porn culture and nurture a healthy and progressive culture’: ‘Cantonese films in Chinese language [*huayu zhong de yue pian*] specialise in intoxicating the audience with “butterfly and mandarin duck” style love songs and tragedies, and martial arts’ (“Films Have a Strong Effect” 1956, 4). Film adverts in the *Nanyang Siang Pau* described

Hokkien pronunciation to spell Malay words throughout. From the fact that this dictionary was reprinted several times, one can see that it had a broad range of uses and was fairly influential. In addition, in earlier times Chinese people in S.E. Asia also used Hakka, Cantonese, and Qiongzhou pronunciation to write and publish Chinese-Malay dictionaries (Yang 1990, 478–79).

Door of Prosperity as ‘the first major Chinese-language (*huayu*) film to be completed using the human and material resources of this country’ (“*Door of Prosperity* Advert” 1959, 8). In 1960, *Film Weekly* (*Dianying zhoubao*) also used *huayu dianying* (Chinese-language film) to refer to films such as the Cantonese films *Love in Malaya* (*Malaiya zhilian*) and *Belle of Penang* (*Bingcheng yan*), and the Amoy films *Lovesickness Sent from Afar* (*Yaoyuan ji xiangsi*) and *Love Deep as the Sea* (*Enqing shen si hai*) (Ma 1960a, 1).

Yi Shui’s work *On Issues of the Malayanisation of Chinese-language Cinema* is an important cultural product of the 1950s’ Chinese language context. In the Malayanised ‘Chinese-language cinema’ advocated by Yi Shui, the term ‘*huayu*’ has exactly the same definition as that given by Sheldon H. Lu and Emilie Yueh-Yu Yeh. It actively includes films in Chinese topolects: ‘Looking at the demand for domestic films in the Malayan market, local Chinese-language films can be shot in three languages: Mandarin, Cantonese, and Amoy’ (Yi 1959, 15). Yi Shui did not exclude other topolects, but concerns about not dispersing the strength of the early development of Malayanised Chinese-language cinema meant that he hoped that Chinese-language cinema would ‘primarily remain at first in the three languages of Mandarin, Cantonese, and Amoy’. He predicted that in the future the Malayanised Chinese-language ‘inevitably may become a language suffused with all topolects, even incorporating Malay’ (Yi 1959, 15–16). However, Yi Shui’s ‘Chinese-language film’ did not advocate a type of pidgin Mandarin. He still proposed that ‘domestic Mandarin (*guoyu*) films must be made in standard Mandarin (not a Beijing accent)’ (16). It is worth noting that Yi Shui specified that ‘standard Mandarin’ was not associated with a Beijing accent. He agreed with the Overseas Chinese colleagues around him that *huayu* was just one topolect among many (14). This shows the ‘multi-lingual symbiosis’ of heterogeneous Chinese in Yi Shui’s concept of ‘Chinese-language film’ (33). In this concept, Beijing Mandarin (*guanhua*) is not the sole basis for the ‘national language’ (*guoyu*), while Chinese topolects and even words from the languages of other ethnicities are included.

‘Chinese-language cinema’ needed to meet the demands of Chinese cinema audiences from diverse geographic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds living in Singapore and Malaya. Before he became a film editor and director, Yi Shui was responsible for the distribution of Chinese-language films in Singapore and Malaya on behalf of Singapore’s Cathay Organisation. He soon realised the differences between Chinese cinema audiences in Singapore and Malaya. However, these differences did not mean that groups of a certain geographical origin would reject films made in the topolect of another region: ‘The audience of Cantonese films is not limited to those with Cantonese ancestry, and the audience of Amoy films is not limited to those with a background in Fujian’ (Yi 1959, 33). The reason for this was ‘they can understand multiple Chinese languages’ (33). Yi Shui believed that the multilingual qualities of Chinese-language film at the time ‘were a powerful tool for multilingual education’ (33). Between the Second World War and 1965,

Hong Kong production companies had close relations with cinemas in Singapore and Malaya. Many film companies relied on funding from cinemas in Singapore and Malaya; without these cinemas purchasing the rights to screen the films in advance, many films would not have been made.⁷ Therefore, during the Cold War, film funding flowed between Singapore, Malaya, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, and any Chinese-language film that rejected other regional language groups limited its reach. Therefore, one cannot simply use the *guoyu* (national language) or 'national film' framework of 'One China' to view Chinese-language film.

Yi Shui's broad perspective is largely similar to the current grand aim for Chinese-language film to be 'homogeneous and heterogeneous' (Tang and Feng 2011, 75); that is, to not only cover films made on the Chinese Mainland but also to include 'films in Chinese from Taiwan, Hong Kong, South-East Asia, Europe, and the US' (73). Yi Shui used the term '*huayu pian*' (Chinese-language film) to refer to Taiwanese films in Mandarin and Amoy (Yi 1959, 109). He also used the terms '*huayu dianying*' and '*huayu pian*' to refer to '*guoyu pian*' (such as *Rainstorm in Chinatown* [*Fengyu niu che shui*, 1956]), Cantonese films (such as *Belle of Penang* [*Bingcheng yan*, 1954]) that were imported from Hong Kong. These films are characterised by the cross-regional flow of film funding, and were all set in Malaya and Singapore. They were also all films that Yi Shui (1959, 4) suggested distributing in Singapore and Malaya to Cathay Organisation chair Loke Wan Tho.

In addition, the legitimisation and popularisation of the term 'Chinese-language cinema' was assisted by the 'national language' (*guoyu*) political struggle in the 1950s' Singapore and Malaya independence movement. While *guoyu* originally implied 'Chinese language' (*zhongguo yu*), it later underwent a transformation to become a synonym of 'Malay language'. This meant that the term '*huayu*', with its implications of cultural identity, had to serve as a catch-all term for all Chinese languages. It was also a means for Chinese people to distinguish their languages from the new 'national language' (Malay language) and other languages such as English.

Yi Shui was more accepting of Malay than he was of English. He was dissatisfied with Malayan officials who gave addresses in English when the Asian Film Festival was held in Malaya. In contrast, the Japanese chair of the Asian Film Producers' Society, Nagata Masaichi, spoke in Japanese with an English translation. Yi Shui believed that as Malay was the 'national language' of Malaya and Singapore, Malayan officials 'should give addresses in the Malayan national language, or at least use the national language and English simultaneously' (Yi 1959, 33). This shows Yi Shui's resistance to the language of the coloniser. It is worth noting that the method of his resistance was to enhance his advocacy of 'Chinese-language cinema' and not Malay

7. In particular, the Shaw brothers, the Loke Wan Tho family, and the Ho Khee Yong family from Singapore and Malaya in the 1950s and '60s controlled the production, distribution, and screening rights for Hong Kong films. See Chung 2004, 126–85; for information on the Shaw brothers, see Chung 2003, 1–13; Chen Mei-ling 2003, 46–75; for the Loke Wan Tho family, see Chung 2009, 30–41; for the Ho Khee Yong family see Yung 2006, 22–33; Chung 2006, 122–27.

films categorised as ‘national language’ cinema. In his book, Yi Shui described his hopes for the ‘national language’ cinema of the future: ‘Chinese people will understand the films both visually and aurally, because the films will have absorbed Chinese vocabulary in greater quantity and to a wider extent so that it is easy for Chinese people to learn and understand’ (33). This hope, derided by Yi Shui himself as ‘sleep talking,’ reveals the author’s cultural worries. He admitted that ‘the national language of today is stuck in a stage of extreme backwardness and poverty’ (33). On many occasions, he worried that Chinese groups would not accept Malay films under the category of ‘national language films,’ as ‘Chinese people look down on Malay films and Indian films out of a strange sense of “superiority”’ (34). He was also critical of this ‘China-centrism’ within the Chinese world. In addition to calling for increased efforts in translating Chinese, Malay, and Indian films, he hoped that ‘films in these three languages should develop simultaneously with the development of Malayan culture’ (34). Here, he chooses to use ‘films in these three languages’ instead of promoting ‘national language’ films as a bridge towards ‘Malayanisation.’ This implicitly shows Yi Shui’s cultural confidence in the ability of ‘Chinese-language cinema’ to appeal to the emotions of compatriots from all ethnicities speaking different Chinese topolects and is a final act of cultural resistance in the face of losing *guoyu* as a term for Chinese language. Yi Shui hoped to promote ‘Chinese-language cinema’ in ‘heterogeneous Chinese’.

It is clear that Chinese-language cinema and heterogeneous Chinese were promoted by Yi Shui a full fifty years before the 21st-century concept of the Sinophone emphasised the ‘multilinguality of sound and script’ (Shih 2011, 715). However, even in a book entitled *Sinophone Cinemas* and edited by two Singaporean scholars working in Australia, the emphasis on the importance of the multilingual, multi-dialectal, and multi-accented characteristics of Sinophone cinemas (Yue and Khoo 2014, 6) is not accompanied by any mention of Yi Shui’s promotion of Chinese-language cinema and heterogeneous Chinese. In recent years Ng Kim Chew (2018), a diasporic Chinese author and scholar from Malaysia who lives in Taiwan, has even felt no need to provide evidence when accusing the theory of “heterogeneous Chinese languages” (*duozhong huayu*) as being lacking in any academic basis. This all shows that the original Singaporean and Malayan memory and history has not only been excluded by scholars from other countries but has even been erased in the minds of scholars from Singapore and Malaysia.

This implies that local Singaporean and Malay(s)an intellectual production on the topic of Chinese-language cinema and heterogeneous Chinese languages lacks legitimacy. Even though these small countries have been independent for over fifty years, local production of knowledge, memory, and history relating to the Chinese language seems only to be visible when it is appended to theories emanating from larger countries. ‘Chinese-language cinema’ had to be written about by scholars such as Sheldon H. Lu, with roots in both China and the US, before it was discussed and transmitted through East and West as a theory originating from a major

country. Does this imply that the mainland Chinese intellectual mainstream only recognises and absorbs the intellectual production of the West? Does Sinophone intellectual production from outside China not enter the Chinese sphere of vision? Or, alternatively, does Western mainstream academia only recognise intellectual production from China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, while ignoring Sinophone intellectual production from other areas? Why do theories of the 'roots' and 'routes' of Chinese-language cinema not recognise Singapore and Malaya as the 'root' and China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan as 'routes' taken in the development of the concept? Shih Shu-mei argues that 'Sinophone studies allows us to rethink the relationship between roots and routes by considering the concept of roots as place-based rather than ancestral' (Shih 2010a, 46). Both interpretations of 'Chinese-language cinema' regard all local discourses relating to origins as being ancestral to China. Sinophone theory can provide a useful critical perspective here.

The two interpretations of Chinese-language cinema are not an isolated case. This phenomenon has repeated itself many times. Before the debate over Chinese-language cinema, there was a similar argument of the concept of 'cultural China'. When in 1991 Tu Wei-Ming traced the origins of the term 'cultural China' (*wenhua zhongguo*) to philosophical journals outside mainland China over the preceding decade or so (Tu 1991, 22), most people assumed this to be the case and did not inquire into the origins of the concept further. They believed that Tu had created the concept of 'cultural China'. In fact this concept had been proposed earlier, by Woon Swee Oan and other members of the *Shenzhou* Poetry Society. Coming from Malaysia, they founded the society in Taiwan, and published the journal *Young China* in Taipei in 1979. The third issue was themed on 'cultural China' (Zhang Hongmin 2011, 57). Now, the concept has been elevated by mainland Chinese scholars into 'a spiritual force with which to seek the grand restoration of the Chinese people' (59); the logic of continuous development underlying this is shared with centripetal Chinese-language cinema discourse. What lies ahead for Sinophone discourse, which continues to develop and spark debate internationally? Perhaps Shih Shu-mei's definition of the Sinophone, which excludes Han Chinese in mainland China, will serve as a red line; yet Wang Der-wei (2006, 3) insists that 'its territory begins abroad, but logically should extend to Mainland Chinese literature'. This has resulted in the several versions of Sinophone theory coexisting today. The territory of the Sinophone undoubtedly originates from abroad, but what of its theory of 'roots and routes'?

3. Remapping the Sinophone: Past and present

The Sinophone theory of roots and routes has always been in opposition to the diasporic Chinese concept, the common idea that the hearts of Chinese people across the world lie with the culture of mainland China and that the culture of Chinese Overseas is but an extension of this culture. Sinophone theory upends the

hierarchy of 'roots' and 'routes' in diaspora discourse and has attracted fierce debate in Chinese and Western academia. Although the theory has only been around for a few decades, there are already three versions of it. I call Chen Peng-Hsiang's 1993 exposition of the Sinophone in Malaysia version 1; Shih Shu-mei's Sinophone discourse, formulated in the US, is version 2; and Wang Der-wei's recent redefinition of it is version 3.

As versions 2 and 3, produced in the US, have been more globally influential, many scholars now attribute the earliest formulation of the Sinophone to Shih Shu-mei's article 'Global Literature and the Technologies of Recognition', published in 2004 in *PMLA*. In a footnote, Shih articulates her definition of the Sinophone for the first time. She believes that Sinophone literature refers to 'literature written in Chinese by Chinese-speaking writers in various parts of the world outside China' (Shih 2004b, 29). This definition, which excludes mainland China, was later adjusted in her 2007 monograph *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific*: 'a network of places of cultural production outside China and on the margins of China and Chineseness, where a historical process of heterogenising and localising of continental Chinese culture has been taking place for several centuries' (Shih 2007, 4). This more conceptualised definition laid the ground for subsequent definitions of the Sinophone which included ethnic minorities in China. For Shih, the cultural production of ethnic minorities in China lies on the margins of China and Chineseness: 'Ethnic minorities in China who speak the standard *hanyu* as their ritualistic induction to Chineseness and Chinese nationality are prototypical of this kind of Sinophone articulation' (31).

This work also extends the application of Sinophone theory from literature to visual culture, providing a groundbreaking model for global Sinophone visual culture. In the conclusion, Shih talks about how she coined the term 'Sinophone' in a challenge to Chinese Han nationalism, with its 'regimes of authenticity' (183). For Shih, the Sinophone leaves behind and criticises Chineseness, and is 'therefore a community of change, occupying a transitional moment (however long in duration) that inevitably integrates further with local communities and becomes constitutive of the local' (Shih 2010a, 45). Here, Shih expresses a radical localisation standpoint. She believes that 'the Sinophone recedes or disappears as soon as the languages in question are abandoned, but this recession or disappearance should not be seen as a cause for lament or nostalgia' (39). In other words, Sinophone theory as Shih interprets it must not only deconstruct Chinese Han nationalism but does not exclude deconstructing the identity of Chinese people outside China. This sparked praise and debate in international academia and marked the beginning of the current wave of global Sinophone research.

Shih Shu-mei is without doubt the founder of Sinophone theory. She redrew the current map of the Sinophone, but the past context of the term has been

forgotten all too quickly.⁸ Just as the terms ‘Chinese-language cinema’ and ‘cultural China’ originated in Singapore and Malay(si)a, there was an earlier version of the Sinophone in Singapore and Malaysia which predates Shih Shu-mei. In this case, the Taiwanese-Malaysian academic and poet Chen Peng-Hsiang wrote an article in Malaysia’s *Sinchew Daily* coining the term nearly a decade before Shih. Chen Peng-Hsiang (1993a) also said in his article that the English term ‘Sinophone’ was one that he had made up. He placed the term alongside ‘Chinese literature in the world’ (*shijie huawen wenxue*), arguing that the two were a loose combination. He did not place the Sinophone in binary opposition to ‘Chinese literature in the world’. Not long afterward, he brought the term to Taiwan,⁹ holding a round-table discussion to follow the 1994 Canada International Comparative Literature Conference. This also marked the first time that he put his Sinophone research onto the agenda of Western Sinology. Presenters at the conference included Lim Kien-Ket and Peng Hsiao-yen (Weng 2014a, 40).

Recently, recalling his concept of the Sinophone, Chen Peng-Hsiang reflects that at the time, he adopted ‘the ideas of weak discourses contrasting with powerful ones, Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), Chow Tse-tsung’s “multiple literary centres”, and even deconstructionist outlooks to explore the dialectical relationship between regional Chinese language literature and the mother literature’ (40–41). Chen Peng-Hsiang, who holds a PhD in comparative literature from National Taiwan University, has written much on Malaysian Chinese literature over the years. His student Lim Kien-Ket later studied in the US, where he wrote ‘On Fang Xiu’. This takes a Peninsular Malaysian New Left theoretical perspective, approving of the Malaysian Chinese historian Fang Xiu’s left-wing Malaysian Chinese historical writings, observing that ‘Fang Xiu’s practice of literary history touches on constructions of “modernity”, and takes on all the deadly consequences of modernity, transforming it into a ‘common poetics’ of Third World literary history’ (Lim Kien-Ket 2000, 92). Like Lim Kien-Ket, Chen Peng-Hsiang inherited Fang Xiu’s anti-imperialist, anti-colonial Third World historical outlook and took up the societal and cultural functions of Malaysian Chinese literature. He acknowledged that the *huawen* (Chinese-language) in ‘Malaysian Chinese literature’ was a marker of its uniqueness, identifying with the anti-imperialist, anti-colonial subjectivity of 20th-century Malaysian Chinese literature. At the same time, and like Lim Kien-Ket, he transcended the limits of the Chinese realist tradition, comparing and reflecting on Malaysian Chinese literature in the dual contexts of Chinese and Western discourses on modernity. He believed that it was necessary for Malaysian Chinese literature to be autonomous from Chinese and Western discourses. Fang Xiu’s histories of

8. The English term ‘Sinophone’ appears in the footnotes of German translator Ruth Keen’s 1988 article. The footnote refers to a book she and Tienchi Martin-Liao were editing on Chinese women’s fiction across Sinophone communities. This collected Chinese women’s fiction from mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Indonesia, and the US. See Keen (1988, 231). Based on my current research, Chen Peng-Hsiang was the first to use the term in the Chinese-speaking world.

9. Chen Peng-Hsiang later published the article in Taiwan’s *Wenxun*. See Chen 1993b, 76–77.

Malaysian Chinese literature, Chen Peng-Hsiang's Sinophone, Lim Kien-Ket's 'Why Mahua Literature?' and 'On Fang Xiu', and Zhang Cuo's (2003, 12–14) 2001 theory of the 'Chinese language literature region' (*huawen wenxue quyu*), which references the idea of the Anglophone: these constitute version 1 of the Sinophone. Of these figures, Zhang Cuo was invited to present his ideas at the Malaysian Huazong Conference and soon afterwards translated the term Sinophone as '*huayu quan*' (Chinese language sphere). All these scholars inherit the anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism of the Third World.

Put simply, the greatest difference between the Sinophone as coined by Shih Shu-mei and the Sinophone as made up by Chen Peng-Hsiang is that the former aims at replacing the concept of 'Chinese Overseas' and deconstructs the personal and linguistic identity of Chinese people outside mainland China. The latter, meanwhile, deconstructs only Chinese literature as a parent culture while retaining Malaysian Chinese identity unchanged and keeping the 'Chinese' firmly in the term 'Malaysian Chinese literature'. Chen Peng-Hsiang's interpretation of the Sinophone is looser and aims at dialectically including Chinese literature and culture in its perspective. In fact, this is the definition later employed by Sheldon H. Lu, Emile Yueh-Yeh Yu, and Wang Der-wei. When Sheldon H. Lu and Emile Yueh-Yeh Yu first proposed the concept of Sinophone film in 2005, they viewed it as being interchangeable with 'Chinese-language film', both terms including mainland Chinese films (Lu and Yeh 2005, 4). Later, Sheldon H. Lu wrote an article in which he characterised Sinophone film as one of the four major paradigms of Chinese-language film, the sole difference between the two being that 'Sinophone film is particularly sensitive to issues of diaspora, identity-formation, colonialism and postcoloniality' (Lu 2012, 23). Lu opposes attempts to tie the 'proper function' of the Sinophone to resisting China (Lu 2008).

Wang Der-wei also believes that although the territory of the Sinophone begins abroad, it should also extend to mainland Chinese literature, though China must be 'included on the outside' (2006, 3). In recent years, encouraged by Tee Kim Tong, Wang Der-wei has begun using a different Chinese term for the Sinophone, *huayifeng*.¹⁰ *Huayi* literally means 'Chinese-foreigner',¹¹ while *feng* has a range of meanings: it is a phonetic equivalent of '-phone' but can also imply 'orientation', 'trend', and 'scenery', all of which ebb and flow between Chinese and foreign (Wang

10. The translation *Huayifeng* originates from the Malaysian local context. David Der-wei Wang and Tee Kim Tong were visiting Malacca in 2014, when they saw a couplet on the door of a handicrafts shop, Red Handicrafts, containing the term. (Wang 2015, v).

11. Wang (2016, 5) believes that the character 夷 *yi* did not have a derogatory meaning in ancient China. Instead, it was a general term used by the Han Chinese to refer to foreigners. Lydia H. Liu's (2006, 31–107) in-depth analysis of the character also demonstrates that it was not equivalent to the derogatory English term barbarian when it was used in pre-modern documents. She observes that 'the legal ban introduced by the British on the Chinese character *yi* through the super-sign *yi*/barbarian at the time of the Opium Wars' (13) led Chinese people to mistakenly believe that the character was derogatory, and to equate it to the English word 'barbarian'. In order to avoid propagating this misunderstanding, this book translates *yi* as 'foreigner' throughout, not 'barbarian'.

2015, iv). He questions the spatial discourse of 'roots' based on post-colonialism or nationalism and observes that the 'post-loyalist' mindset found throughout the Sinophone world must be given due importance. He proposes post-loyalist discourse as a means to reflect on Shih Shu-mei's ever-present post-colonial discourse. The post-loyalists 'are displaced in that already displaced time and space, remembering an orthodoxy that was perhaps never that orthodox. This attitude can be decadent and indulgent . . . post-loyalist discourse brings a difficult choice to those of us who are abroad when facing up to issues such as Chineseness, the so-called orthodoxy of the Chinese language, or the right to a Chinese patrimony' (Wang 2015, 28). Chinese diaspora discourse as his starting point, he argues that 'China' is not a solid block; in practice, crossing 'China's' frontiers and deconstructing it constitutes a 'diaspora discourse' Sinophone. Shih Shu-mei (2017, 54–69), meanwhile, suspects that global Chinese diaspora discourse conceals 'China-centrism' and that the Sinophone must construct an 'against-diaspora' discourse. She also asks rhetorically whether, if Sinophone literature includes Chinese 'orthodox' literature, there is any need to construct such a thing as 'Sinophone literature' at all.

The debates on Sinophone research appear to repeat the ideologies and logic of the 'Chinese language discourse structure' underlying the terms 'Chinese language' and 'Chinese-language film'. Shih Shu-mei's version 2 of Sinophone discourse is centrifugal, while Chen Peng-Hsiang's version 1 and Wang Der-wei's version 3 are centripetal. The biggest difference between version 1 and the other two versions is found in its understanding of and assessment of Chinese literature in the world and anti-imperialist, anti-colonial Third World literature. Version 1 of the Sinophone attempts to dialectically include overseas Chinese-language literature and Chinese literature within the territory of Chinese literature in the world. Moreover, according to Chen Peng-Hsiang, the terms 'Sinophone' and 'Chinese literature in the world' are interchangeable, while acknowledging the importance of the Sinophone's heritage as anti-imperialist, anti-colonial Third World literature. Version 1 of the Sinophone comprehensively witnesses and participates in the process of the localisation of mainland Chinese-language culture in S.E. Asia over the past few centuries; through this process, one cannot avoid the question of how to face up to anti-imperialist, anti-colonial Third World history. Versions 2 and 3, in contrast, tend to problematise the concept of 'Chinese literature in the world' and are more ready to take a modern, globalised perspective on the history and evolution of the Sinophone in various locations. However, Shih Shu-mei's anti-imperialist, anti-colonial critical perspective differs from that seen in version 1 discourse, where Anglo-American and Japanese imperialism and colonialism are explored. She also has harsh criticism for Chinese imperialism and colonialism, whereas version 1 sees China as a weak Third World country. Although versions 2 and 3 of the Sinophone have areas of divergence, both sides agree that Sinophone literature is not the same as the 'Chinese literature in the world' that mainland Chinese scholars discuss so

enthusiastically and that Sinophone literary culture should not be centred on mainland China.

Shih Shu-mei's position of excluding mainland Han Chinese from the territory of the Sinophone has led Wang Der-wei to worry: 'Is this not a post-Cold War position? Between China and abroad there is no clear difference in political territory, like we imagined in the 1950s and 1960s' (Weng 2014b, 32). Shih Shu-mei, in contrast, clarifies that 'China is no longer a Communist country, and the current standoff between China and America should no longer be interpreted in Cold War terms . . . China retains Communism in name, though in fact it is extremely capitalist. . . I still maintain that I am left wing, and so my criticisms of China are actually criticisms of the way it has completely destroyed the original ideals of socialism' (Hee 2015, 186–87). Shih Shu-mei does not believe that she is revisiting the ideas of the Cold War and argues that the Sinophone enables multidimensional criticism, not only of China-centrism, but also of American white-centrism and English language supremacy (175). The Sinophone's objects of criticism should be understood as imperial; it faces up to multiple surviving historical empires (Shih 2017, 61).

The cultural production of Chinese-language film in Singapore and Malaya before and during the Cold War also had to face competition between multiple empires and their discourses. In different historical periods, Chinese-language film in Singapore and Malaya was caught between the binary dichotomy of the 'free world' vs the 'authoritarian world' spread by Anglo-American imperialism, the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere discourse of Japanese imperialism, and the binary dichotomy of 'capitalism' vs 'socialism' imported by China from the Soviet Union and then exported around the globe. In this Cold War context, S.E. Asia became a frontier in Anglo-American attempts to contain the rise of Communism in mainland China. At the time, terms such as *huayu* ('Chinese language') and *guoyu* ('national language'), *huayu pian* ('Chinese-language film') and *guopian* ('national film'), and *huaren* ('Chinese person') and *zhongguoren* (also 'Chinese person' but with more of an emphasis on 'China') began to be re-delineated in Singaporean and Malayan intellectual and cultural production, mainland China placed on the political and geographical frontier. Rather than debate whether contemporary Sinophone research should include or exclude mainland Han Chinese, it is more fruitful to discuss how the Anglo-American bloc in the Cold War, which did not include China at all, produced culture and knowledge in Sinophone communities. To what extent does it form the basis on which contemporary Sinophone culture and knowledge is produced? Perhaps only by retracing and drawing upon the Third World memories and experiences underlying the Sinophone of the past can we fully understand the frontiers of the current territory of the Sinophone, and the debates that rage over it.

Afterword

There are both continuities and rupture points in the cultural production of Singaporean and Malayan Chinese-language film before and during the Cold War. Before, appeals to Chineseness were the main theme of Chinese-language cinema, as *New Friend* and Wu Cun's three films embodied weakening appeals to Chineseness. During the Cold War, the theme of how Chinese identity could survive began to replace the assumed default of Chineseness in Malayanised Chinese-language film. Retreating from the battlefield of Chineseness to defend the Chinese language became the greatest common denominator in maintaining Chinese identity. Anglo-American anti-communist films, from the MFU to Hollywood, regarded Chineseness as a S.E. Asian extension of Chinese communism and regarded Chinese identity as Chinese chauvinism. This cultural production attempted to fabricate a Chinese ethnic identity, while simultaneously interpellating the local identity of Singaporean and Malayan Chinese people: bidding farewell to being 'neither Malayan nor Chinese' and moving towards a nationalist discourse under which Chinese people would assimilate with Malays. This created a rupture between Singaporean and Malayan Chinese people and their Chinese historical identity, and with Chinese nationalism. The cultural production of Malayanised Chinese-language cinema was a response to this assimilationist nationalist discourse. On the surface, the singing and dancing in these films seemed to gloss over the chaotic reality of Chinese marginalisation during the Malayan Emergency, but in reality they apply the strength of the contemporary discourse of independence and self-government in order to secretly support Third-World anti-imperialist, anti-colonial idealism.

The cultural production of Singaporean and Malayan Chinese-language film before and during the Cold War has an unbroken Third World anti-imperialist, anti-colonial stance running through it, but it all lived and died within the broader control of the US and the UK. Even before the Cold War, the British colonial government opened up an ideological battle between the socialist and capitalist camps by cutting a third of the content of the first Singaporean and Malayan film, *New Friend*. As the harsh censorship of the British colonial government shows, the anti-imperialist and anti-colonial standpoint of director Guo Chaowen and the actor Zheng Chaoren expressed a Chinese nationalism powerful enough to threaten colonial

rule. However, during that era, as the CCP and KMT intermittently cooperated and fought with each other, China was collapsing under internal and external pressures. The majority of film-makers, whether they supported the KMT, CCP, or had no party affiliation, tended to think in an anti-imperialist, anti-colonial manner. The distinction between left- and right-wing in the film world was not a sharp one. For a long period, it was very usual for people to flow between different camps. However, the cultural Cold War which gradually spread around the world after the Second World War gave this anti-imperialist, anti-colonial outlook the label of 'communist' or 'terrorist'; similarly, those who did not bellow anti-imperialist or anti-colonial slogans were called 'running dogs' (*zougou*) or 'traitors to the Chinese race' (*hanjian*). This was all designed at heightening the binary dichotomy between left and right. However, most Chinese language film-makers remained in a 'neither left nor right' or 'both left and right' state and were attacked or ignored by leftist and rightist groups. Figures such as Liu Beijin, Guo Chaowen, Wu Cun, Yi Shui, Hou Yao, and Wan Hoi-ling all faced this predicament.

After the Second World War, Wu Cun could make three anti-imperialist, anti-colonial Chinese-language films in Singapore. He happened upon the honeymoon period between the British and the MCP after the Japanese withdrawal. The MCP cooperated with the British, came out of the jungle, and handed over some of their weapons. They also planned to unite with other local ethnicities to strive for a constitutional parliamentary democracy. Between the end of the Second World War and 1948, there seemed to be space for the revival of Singaporean and Malayan anti-imperialist, anti-colonial Chinese-language cinema. Why did Wu Cun, a noted director who before the war was willing to cooperate with right-wing directors in Shanghai to make several films criticised as 'soft' by left-wing critics, come to S.E. Asia to make leftist Chinese-language films? The answer is intimately connected to the high tide in anti-imperialist, anti-colonial feeling among Chinese people in Singapore and Malaya, caused by the successive blows of British and Japanese imperialisms. In this atmosphere, Wu Cun used the perspective of left-wing film to witness and record this soon-to-vanish popular memory. The Chinese-language films *Blood and Tears of the Overseas Chinese*, *Spirit of the Overseas Chinese*, and *Honour & Sin* aka *Miss Nanyang*, made locally at around the same time as Wu Cun was in the region, were all produced by China Motion Picture Studio with an anti-Japanese theme; they also had an anti-imperialist, anti-colonial flavour. The latter two films were directed by Wan Hoi-ling. Wan was the assistant and romantic partner of famous Chinese director Hou Yao when he was in S.E. Asia. She also learned from him in Hong Kong, and her ideas of cinema were profoundly influenced by him. The two also co-directed a number of films in Hong Kong.

Hou Yao's work *How to Write Cinema Scripts*, completed in June 1925, is an early example of Chinese screenwriting theory and advocated the idea that 'the script is the soul of the film' (Hou 1926, 1). However, it also clarified the independence of film, clearly demarcating the fundamental differences between film

and stage drama (Wu Yingjun 2015, 80–83).¹ This work was praised for the way in which it drew on uniquely Chinese philosophical and cultural ideals to create a Chinese (or Eastern) system of film theory (Chen Xihe 1986, 83–84). Hou's 1927 film *Romance of the Western Chamber* is the earliest viewable Chinese costume drama (Peng Yaochun 2006, 113). In recent years, the newly discovered extant parts of Hou's 1927 film *A Poet From The Sea*, other extant works, and his writings have been praised by Zhang Zhen (2011, 232) as 'capturing a precious moment in the formational period of Chinese film and modern visual culture'. When he was young, although Hou Yao 'had studied Marx, he was not fully won over by communism, and in his works from that era there is no evidence of radical class thought, or of class struggle' (Law Kar 2014, 9). Several early issues-based dramas he made at the Great Wall Film Company, such as *Abandoned Wife (Qifu)*, display a 'powerful consciousness of women's rights, and also Marxism-influenced traces of sympathy with the proletariat and the oppressed. However, they primarily identify problems, demand that society face up to them, and ask people to resolve them of their own volition; they do not advocate class struggle or societal revolution' (Law Kar 2014, 10). Therefore, though the significance of several issues-based dramas was praised, Hou Yao receives a very low rating in Cheng Jihua's (1980, 109–10) *History of the Development of Chinese Cinema*. *A Poet From the Sea* is criticised as being 'beneficial to the reactionary controlling classes', and he was even labelled a 'bourgeois right-wing element'. This is because in his later political activities in the resistance against the Japanese, he was sucked into the power struggle between the KMT and CCP. The Chinese Youth Party he joined with in the struggle against Japan had always been opposed to the CCP and became an illegal organisation, persecuted by the KMT (Law Kar 2014, 16–18). When Hou escaped to Hong Kong in the 1930s, he gained temporary respite from party politics and regained his original status as an independent intellectual (10). He made a living by writing anti-Japanese tracts and publishing popular fiction and directed a number of Cantonese films. These took in a broad range of themes, including folk tales, morality dramas, romance films, and national defence films. However, the KMT's policy of banning Chinese topolect films, and of harshly censoring or banning films of folk tales, caused uproar in the Hong Kong film industry. Hou made his strenuous opposition clear: 'I oppose those in the cultural world using the words "traitor to the Chinese" and "crazed" to criticise the cinema world at the drop of a hat. There is a great deal of suffering which goes into making films of folk tales, and many of them aim to promote loyalty, filial piety, integrity, and righteousness' (33). Such arguments offended not only the KMT but also led left-wing film workers such as Cai Chusheng to attack him. Hou

1. Hou's work is not the earliest Chinese work on cinema scriptwriting. It is predated by Xu Zhuodai's *Cinema Studies (Yingxi xue)* and *An Overview of Cinema (Yingxi gailun)*, co-written by Zhou Jianyun and Wang Xichang. *An Overview of Cinema* is the first Chinese-language work to systematically combine cinematic aesthetics and pedagogy (Zhang Zhen 2005, 133). For analysis of these three books, see Zhang Zhen (2005, 132–44; 157–69).

You's 'neither left nor right' political standpoint and concept of cinema, just like Wu Cun's, was unable to please either left- or right-wing Chinese critics. On arriving in S.E. Asia, both men also directed Malay films in order to survive; they also shared the same anti-colonial, anti-imperialist stance of resistance to the Japanese.

Hou Yao and Wan Hoi-ling were invited to Singapore to direct films by the Shaw Organisation in 1940. They were joined by Chinese stars, including Lily Lee. The English-language press at the time reported that Hou would direct Malay and Cantonese films, while Lily Lee would perform in a Cantonese film ("Malay Films" 1940, 10). However, Hou Yao never directed any Cantonese films in S.E. Asia. Instead, he and Wan co-wrote and directed seven Malay films (Bren 2013, 11). The first one, trailed as the 'First Singapore-Made Malay Talkie', was *Mutiara*, which cost 20,000 Malayan dollars to make. Adverts claimed that this film told 'A Story Replete with Action, Romance, Comedy, Songs and Music Galore' ("First Singapore-Made" 1940, 7). As *Mutiara* was very successful at the box office, the two followed up on their hit with their second Malay film, *Bermadu*. Promotion for the film in local Malay Jawi script publications introduced these two Chinese directors as shooting Malay films in an earnest effort to promote and re-invigorate the Malay spirit. The headline used the phrase 'Modern Malay-language film' to highlight the way the film encapsulated the spirit of the age ("*Bermadu*: Filem" 1940, 13). Film critics of the time pointed out that the film was made entirely in Singapore and praised how the *kampung* (countryside) scenes were especially well done, with no attempt made to 'dress up' the villages to suit the film. The film was also praised for being extremely entertaining: even audiences who did not understand much Malay found it easy to follow ("*Bermadu*' Filmed" 1940, 2). The Shaw Organisation always put profit first in their film productions: from the way that these two directed seven Malay films in only fifteen months, it appears that these films were very successful at the regional box office. They were not only screened in Singapore but also in Malaya, Borneo, and Indonesia. However, their Malay film career was ended by the Japanese occupation of Singapore in 1942.

As Hou Yao had already taken part in anti-Japanese resistance activities in 1930s China and had made several very successful national defence films in Hong Kong in addition to his anti-Japanese writings, he was known to the Japanese troops. He was reported to the authorities and executed by the Japanese on 15 February 1942 (Hsu 1955, 37). Another theory is that he was killed on the ninth day of the first lunar month, the last day on which the Japanese compelled citizens to register. He was forced to pick up a 'good citizen ID' and murdered (Hu Rongnü 1945, 2). Wan Hoi-ling, having lost her lover, opened a coffee shop in Singapore. She was witnessed by a *The Amusement* reporter as 'being both owner and worker, living in austere poverty'. She also taught singing and dancing for films ("Female Director" 1946, 1).

After the Second World War, Wan Hoi-ling returned to directing with *Spirit of the Overseas Chinese*. This was set in the time of resistance against the Japanese. The brother and sister, Zhong Guocai and Zhong Aihua, who come to Singapore from

China to stay with their uncle, are symbols for the close relationship between her and Hou Yao. The film contains biting satire on middle- to upper-class S.E. Asian Overseas Chinese: speaking in a heavy English accent, they express a complete lack of concern for the Japanese invasion of China. For example, the uncle, Xu, is stingy when students come to his door collecting money to fight the Japanese. In contrast, lower- and middle-class Overseas Chinese, such as rickshaw pullers, enthusiastically donate to the Chinese war effort. Wan uses the language of cinema to concisely represent the fluidity and two differing identities attached to the English and Chinese languages among S.E. Asian Overseas Chinese communities, recording the shifts in identity of different classes of Overseas Chinese in and before the period of Japanese occupation. Zhong Guocai is killed by a Japanese spy at the end of the film, shouting 'Long live China!' before he dies. The final scene shows Zhong Aihua, her face disfigured by a collaborator, her cousin Xu Weisheng, and his partner, Li Na, bowing to Zhong Guocai's grave, which is inscribed with the words 'Spirit of the Overseas Chinese: The Grave of Zhong Guocai'. This scene is evidently a call from the director to the soul of Hou Yao, who died overseas without a grave. The film was previewed on 27 October 1946 in the Majestic cinema ("Wan Hoi-ling Directs" 1946, 4). On 30 November and 1 December of the same year, it was screened twice at midnight in the same cinema ("Advert for *Spirit of the Overseas Chinese*" 1946a, 8); 'both screenings sold out' ("Advert for *Spirit of the Overseas Chinese*" 1946b, 8). When its formal screening began, it ran for four consecutive days, from 5 to 9 December, four screenings per day ("Advert for *Spirit of the Overseas Chinese*" 1946c, 4). From the records of its screening, it appears that this film was not 'weak at the box office' as it was later remembered (Xu Yongshun 2015, 35).

The next year, Wan completed *Honour & Sin* aka *Miss Nanyang*, which was themed around comfort women and anti-Japanese guerrillas. The eye-catching film posters proclaimed 'Guerrillas "shed blood" for the survival of the nation . . . inspiring respect! A pure woman sacrifices her body to gain "intelligence" . . . bringing tears!' It continues to claim that 'the ideology of the content can be said to: exceed the "artistic level"!' and to call on national solidarity, declaring that 'all my compatriots must watch this film' (Feng 1999, 286). The film was not, as Canadian scholar Jan Uhde (2010, 26) claims, ultimately never screened. Instead, it was screened for two days on 8 and 9 October 1947, four screenings each day ("Advert for *Miss Nanyang*" 1947a, 2; 1947b, 6). After filming was completed, Wan Hoi-ling told the media that she was exhausted and could not find the courage in her to make another film ("Third China Motion Picture Studio Production" 1947, 9).

After the Second World War, there was an economic depression in Singapore and a lack of film equipment and other facilities. As 'technologies were somewhat backward, and equipment was somewhat old: all the film and camera equipment was left behind by the Japanese troops, it was perhaps inevitable that films would be made in a rough manner, despite the meticulous nature of their content' (Feng 1999, 285). The three anti-Japanese films produced by the China Motion Picture

Studio, *Blood and Tears of the Overseas Chinese*, *Spirit of the Overseas Chinese*, and *Miss Nanyang*, were all completed in very adverse conditions. The aim of these films was to reveal the violence of the Japanese troops in S.E. Asia: their urgent historical calling to record the collective trauma suffered by Overseas Chinese communities during the era of occupation is perhaps far more important than their entertainment value or artistic aspirations. The antagonists in these films are all Chinese collaborators or Japanese, reflecting the pained cry of the collective suffering of Overseas Chinese during the occupation. However, after the British outlawed the MCP in 1948 and announced the Emergency, these films could not pass the British colonial censor and were banned from being screened (292). This led to them being gradually forgotten.

In the period that the British and the MCP were working together, many Chinese literati and artists involved in the anti-Japanese resistance came south. These were essentially the core team involved in making Chinese-language films in Singapore and Malaya after the war. In early 1947, the left-wing filmmaker Xia Yan came to work in Singapore under the orders of Zhou Enlai. He wrote for the *Nan Chiau Jit Pao*, which was run by Hu Yuzhi, and promoted communist ideas, unity, and patriotism. He also formed a film distribution body, Xinlian (United Enterprises), which supported the activities of the Chinese Kunlun Film Company and the Hong Kong Nanqun Film Company, which were led by underground CCP members (Zhao 2011, 47). In June 1947, Xia Yan instructed *Nan Chiau Jit Pao* supplement editor Tang Yu and printing press manager Lin Feng to establish and manage Xinlian. He also asked figures including Hsu Chiao Meng, who had stayed behind in S.E. Asia after the New China Theatre Troupe's tour there, to assist. The company distributed over twenty Chinese-made progressive films, including *The Spring River Flows East* (*Yijiang chunshui xiang dongliu*), *Spring Dream in Heaven* (*Tiantan chunmeng*), and *Distant Love* (*Yaoyuan de ai*). The first part of *The Spring River Flows East*, *Eight War-Torn Years* (*Banian liluan*), which was themed on the resistance against the Japanese, caused a sensation in S.E. Asia (47). Later, there were not enough funds for the second part, *The Dawn* (*Tianliang qianhou*). Tang Yu managed to collect US\$50,000 in Singapore through pre-payments, and invested in the film through Xia Yunhu, the largest shareholder and executive director of Kunlun Film (Zhang Lifan 2005, 52). In his later years, Tang Yu reminisced on how he managed to gather the \$50,000 from a rich Burmese merchant to serve as share capital for the distribution company he and Lin Feng were forming in Singapore and to invest in the second part of *The Spring River Flows East*. The film was a great success in S.E. Asia, filling the distribution company's coffers (Tang Yu 1997, 91). However, the profits from the film's Singapore distribution were not returned to Kunlun Film, causing widespread complaints among shareholders. Xia Yunhu withdrew his money from the film as it was being completed and took it abroad, returning his \$50,000 to Tang Yu (Zhang Lifan 2005, 52). This is the only evidence I have been able to find to prove CCP involvement in post-war Singaporean and Malayan film culture: the scale of

the capital it gathered from private investors and its modest effects are clearly minor when compared to the films made by the US and the UK through the MFU and Sound Masters Inc.

This is not to say that the CCP did not realise the importance of exporting Chinese films. Xia Yan, who worked closely with the CCP, published an article in Singapore in 1939 demanding that China must 'systematically produce and export films which promote our holy war to Americans and Europeans' (Xia Yan 1939, 1). The 'holy war' is the war against the Japanese. Early left-wing Chinese intellectuals who got involved in S.E. Asian culture mostly did so to support the war effort: communism was not the ultimate aim for them, merely an ideological tool to unify, arm, and inspire people against imperialism. In 1947, Xia Yan did establish a cultural working group in Singapore under the instructions of the party and was appointed its head (Chen Rongli 2005, 242–43). However, his stay in Singapore lasted less than six months: he arrived on 20 March 1947, and was 'politely escorted out of the country' by the British in August of the same year (Zhong and Yi 2007, 277–78).² After the fierce debate on the 'uniqueness of Malayan Chinese literature and art' erupted, the *Nan Chiau Jit Pao* of 13 April 1948 carried an article sent by Xia Yan from Hong Kong entitled 'A preliminary discussion of Malayan Chinese literature and art', which supported Hu Yuzhi's (Sha Ping) call for Malayan Chinese literature and art to take on a dual purpose:

The two words 'Malayan Chinese' define the nature of this dual task. To say that I am just a temporary Overseas Chinese resident, and I do not care what goes on in Malaya is one bias; to say that I am one of the owners of Malaya and I do not care what goes in China is another bias. In fact, if you subjectively would like not to care, or want others not to care, then that doesn't work, and cannot be done. (Xia Yan 1948, 17)

Xia Yan points out the duality of Malayan Chinese identity in subjective and objective terms. There is often a large gap between the way that Malayan Chinese people regard the relationship between them and China, and how other people regard the relationship between Malayan Chinese people and China. He sees this as difficult to avoid but hopes that people will not be guided by their biases. This is also the reason why Malayan Chinese literature and art has to take on a dual purpose.

During the war against the Japanese and the Chinese Civil War many Chinese song and dance troupes came to S.E. Asia to tour and raise money. Many stayed behind to develop their careers, later working backstage for and acting in Singaporean and Malayan Chinese-language films. One of them was the Xinlian film department manager Hsu Chiao Meng (Xu Jiaomeng). He was the cameraman for the first post-Second World War Chinese-language documentary film, *Glory of*

2. When exactly did Xia Yan arrive in Singapore in 1947? There are currently various theories circulating in academia. Some say he arrived in April (Chen Rongli 2005, 242); others say 'summer', likely June or July (Tang Yu 1997, 90).

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