"Not a particularly happy expression": "Malayanization" and the China threat in Britain's late-colonial Southeast Asian territories[1]

Jeremy E. Taylor

Introduction

In his 1997 study of "the Malayan Chinese and China," Fujio Hara details the gradual decline in what was labeled "China minded-ness" in 1950s Malaya, alongside the rise of what he refers to as a "Malaya-oriented identity consciousness" (Hara 1997, 102) within ethnic Chinese communities there. As Malaya gained independence in August 1957, many "Chinese" already saw themselves as having a stake in this new post-colonial, pluralistic nation-state, having put aside older, Diasporic affinities to

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the "motherland." Hara speculates about whether it was the "strong arm, repressive tactics of the British authorities [during the Malayan Emergency]...or the transformation in consciousness taking place in the Malayan Chinese community" (100) which led to such significant changes over such a short span of time. He also suggests that the growth of a distinctly "Malayan Chinese" identity was inseparable from "the repressive measures...that the British implemented" (103).

The questions posed by Hara in 1997 were typical of an earlier generation of scholarship which took seriously the role of the colonial state in shaping the very notion of the "Malayan Chinese" (e.g., Oong 2000). Such work also critically considered "global and transnational cultural influences"—especially from China and Hong Kong—on Malaya (Carstens 2005, 213). While some of the resulting literature was itself tinged by Cold War-inflected views of China's influence in the region (from both the Left and the Right) (e.g., Yong 1987; Ramanathan 1994), it nonetheless presented a convincing case for colonial agency in shaping postcolonial identities, while also framing the study of the Malayan Emergency (and decolonization more generally) in the wider geopolitical context of the Cold War.

In contrast, current scholarship on the cultural history of the "Malayan Chinese" suggests a clear shift away from emphasis on both the colonial state *and* its fears about a resurgent China in the 1950s. In focusing instead on the agency of local cultural producers in the forging of new "Malayan Chinese" identities, studies published in recent years have placed greater emphasis on anti-colonial interpretations of "Malayanization"—the process by which Sinocentric identities were replaced by "Malaya-oriented" ones—wresting the term itself from the colonial lexicon. Anna

Belogurova's (2015) comparative account of the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malayan Communist Party (MCP), for example, reminds us how both these groups—so often assumed to represent opposing worldviews—shared a devotion to the ideal of a multicultural, postcolonial Malaya which could be traced back to the 1930s (i.e., well before the era of Hara's study), and which, in both cases, represented a form of anti-colonial resistance. Wai Siam Hee, while acknowledging the importance of the colonial state in the process of Malayanization, focuses on what he refers to as the "Third World politics of Malayanization in the 1950s and 1960s" (Hee 2017, 132), including the adoption of Malayanization by "anti-colonial parties" in spheres such as filmmaking. At the same time, and in keeping with the scholarly rise in "Sinophone" sensibilities over the last decade, the "China factor" has been increasingly, and sometimes explicitly, marginalized in studies of "Malayan Chinese" cultural history, in which the agency of self-consciously Malayan intellectuals is brought to the fore (e.g., Groppe 2016).

Parallel, but quite separate to this literature is the new "revisionist" scholarship on the Malayan Emergency. Much of this work, while certainly focusing on the colonial state, is shaped more by questions of counter-insurgency than culture. Many recent studies of the Emergency, for example, have examined the process of British withdrawal from the region through the prism of colonial violence (e.g., Nonini 2015, 27-48; Yao 2016), or the effectiveness (or otherwise) of military strategy. Even many studies of cultural policy have been framed in this way, focusing primarily on propaganda or psychological warfare (e.g., Maguire 2014). Such work has been informed by a broader "revisionist" approach to the study of counter-insurgency

throughout the British empire (Hack 2018). Events beyond academe, such as attempts to force an inquiry into the killing of civilians at Batang Kali in 1948 (McGregor 2016), and the release in 2013 of Wong Kew-Lit's film *Xincun* (*The New Village*)—depicting, in stark terms, the trauma of forced resettlement under the Briggs' Plan—have also contributed to this tendency to view the Emergency through the lens of colonial brutality.

The new "cultural history" of "Sinophone Malaya" and the "revisionist" scholarship of the Emergency, have both generated significant new contributions to the study of this period. However, the concurrent development of these two literatures has had the inadvertent effect of dichotomizing the study of "the Chinese" in late colonial Malaya into one of colonialist repression in the jungle, and progressive "Malayanized" cultural resistance in the cities. Only a handful of studies have hitherto managed to bridge this divide (e.g., Lee 2013; Low 2014).

This puts the historiography of late-colonial Malaya at odds with other histories of the Cold War in East and Southeast Asia. The emerging literature on transformations in cultural identity in Indonesia, for example, puts the relationship with the PRC at the center of analysis (e.g., Liu 2011). In other cases, scholars emphasize the links between high colonial (and Cold War) politics and the circulation of cultural products "on the ground" in places such as Hong Kong (e.g., Oyen 2010). Inspired by an approach described by Gordon Johnston (2010, 294) as the study of "the cultural Cold War" (i.e., that which examines "...the range of ways in which high and popular cultures were produced, deployed, interpreted and challenged"); deploying methods from investigative history refined by the likes of Frances Stonor

Saunders (1999); and drawing on newly available archival sources, such scholarship is forcing us to reconsider the role of Cold War and/or colonial powers in shaping everything from literature (e.g., Shen 2017) and cinema (Xu 2017) to religion (e.g., Ford 2017). Such work is also starting to complicate Tony Day's (2010, 2) assertion that the Cold War in Asia was "...driven by regional historical imperatives as much as by global forces," for it evaluates the ways in which cultural production was linked to, or at the very least influenced by, cultural programs deployed from Washington, London, or Beijing.

In revisiting the questions that Hara posed about "Malayanization" more than two decades ago, this paper is inspired by this "cultural Cold War" turn. It will chart how "non-Malayan" actors (ranging from colonial planners in London to anti-communist intellectual refugees in Hong Kong) were thrown together with groups such as the MCA as a result of British anxieties about influence from a "rising China" in the 1950s. It aims to provide fuller answers to questions about the efficacy of colonial "strong arm" tactics by engaging with archival materials to which scholars such as Hara did not have access in the 1990s. These include the so-called "colonial administration records" at the National Archives in London, which contain a rich array of evidence concerning internal British debates on China's influence in Malaya. In addition, it will draw on the papers of organizations such as the Asia Foundation—a source which has informed many recent "cultural Cold War" studies (e.g., Klein 2017)—held at the Hoover Institution, and a variety of private papers from figures prominent in the MCA and other key groups in this period. Considered in conjunction with published materials, such sources not only confirm Hara's suspicions

about the importance of colonial policy in the 1950s, but also suggest that colonial anxieties about the influence of the PRC on the "Malayan Chinese"—even after the military demise of Malayan communism—caused perhaps more angst for late colonial planners than has hitherto been acknowledged.

None of this contradicts the fact that various groups who opposed British rule themselves adopted notions of "Malayanization" independent of, and sometimes in opposition to, colonial policy (Khor 2007). Nor is it to suggest that the PRC ever *did* represent a genuine threat to British attempts to "unite and quit" the region in an orderly fashion (Hack 2001, 131). To ascertain the extent to which this was the case would require extensive analysis of the PRC archival record—something that, for reasons of access and space, I have not attempted in this paper. Nonetheless, in seeking to apply the methodological lessons learned from "cultural Cold War studies" to questions which have been left untouched over the last two decades, this paper will illustrate how the geopolitics of the Cold war in Asia—and not just a local communist insurgency—were key to "Malayanization," and resulted in cultural and institutional legacies which long outlasted British rule.

"Malayanization" and the China threat

By the late 1940s, Britain could claim a long legacy of studying and governing "the Chinese" in its colonial possessions, a tradition that was revived in the postwar years with the reinstatement of organizations such as the Secretariats of Chinese Affairs in Singapore and Malaya (Leow 2016, 145-146). Indeed, prior to World War II, colonial authorities had spent considerable time and effort in controlling the circulation of

ideas and institutions of Chinese origin in British Southeast Asia in particular (cf. Yong & McKenna 1990). Given such depth of knowledge, it is perhaps surprising that imperial responses to mainland Chinese cultural influence in the postwar years were neither consistent nor coherent across the British empire. This was certainly the case following the outbreak of the Malayan Emergency in 1948, and in the context of an on-going civil war in China, when attitudes towards the circulation of Chinese-language media began to diverge.

In Malaya, an insurgency led primarily by ethnic Chinese communists in the MCP, and sharing much of its iconography and language with Chinese communism (Hack 2008), gave an entirely new significance to Chinese-language films, books, and music that had been exported to the region since the end of World War II. In this context, virtually *all* media and publications emanating from China were considered to be a potential threat to stability. Fears of institutional ties between Malayan and Chinese communism justified the control of imported reading material from China under *The Undesirable Publications Ordinance*, introduced in 1948 (Kaur & Ramanathan 2008).

The priorities for officials in Hong Kong, on the other hand, were quite different. In this colonial port, caution, pragmatism, and a facade of neutrality were deemed essential to maintaining order, given the proximity of the colony to the PRC (Tsang 1997). As a result, under the cautious Governor Alexander Grantham, a more conciliatory approach was adopted, one which, as Priscilla Roberts argues (2016, 36), involved protecting Hong Kong's "...interests rather than those of metropolitan government in London." Here, acknowledgement of a desire on the part of local

audiences for Chinese cultural products was balanced with the political will not to unnecessarily upset Beijing. Patterns of censorship in Hong Kong were thus designed to protect law and order rather than restrict the spread of global communism (Ng 2008), while an American-financed Chinese-language propaganda infrastructure was permitted to develop covertly at the same time (Oyen 2010).

The quite different approaches adopted in Southeast Asia and Hong Kong led to tensions from the very start of the 1950s. Despite bans on "undesirable" materials in Malaya, PRC-published (or pro-PRC) pamphlets, books, and periodicals flooded into Southeast Asia after 1949—not always from the PRC itself, but often from colonial Hong Kong, where there was a reluctance to ban material which was not overtly adversarial to British rule in the city. This included "...magazines, etc, published in Hong Kong, which contain no overt propaganda, but nonetheless succeed in giving a favourable picture of modern China."(TNA 1953c) Faced with publications such as these, censors in Singapore and Malaya struggled to find a coherent response which would not involve banning books from a fellow British colonial possession.

Nonetheless, despite differences of opinion about how best to control the flow of such Chinese media, officials in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia did agree on one thing—i.e., that they were dealing with the same conundrum when distinguishing what specific elements of PRC media were objectionable. What was it about any book, song, or film that made it dangerous: its socialism, or its "Chineseness"? Biographies of Mao Zedong, Chinese editions of the writings of Marx or Stalin, and books about "progressive youth" (*jinbu qingnian*)—all barred from import into Malaya alongside dozens of other titles in 1952, for example (SPH 1952)—were clearly socialist in

content. But what of geography textbooks, folk songs, or pre-1949 modern literature published in the PRC? Bans on such material were far harder to justify under Emergency regulations, and risked alienating large sections of the community, especially when so little other reading material in Chinese was readily available.

In the context of the Emergency, there is no doubt that socialism in any form—Chinese or Malayan—was a grave concern for colonial censors. However, Chinese media emanating from the PRC, and without an overtly "socialist" message, could also be potentially subversive insofar as it contradicted British policy, and specifically "Malayanization." As Hak Ching Oong (1993, 248-255) has explained, the idea of implementing a policy of "Malayanization" was initiated by the Secretariat of Chinese Affairs in late 1948. Its subsequent adoption by the Colonial Office was directly inspired by the onset of the Emergency, and fears about the integrity of an orderly process of decolonization should local communities not "buy into" British visions of an independent Malaya within the Commonwealth—a hypothetical "Southeast Asian Dominion," as it was viewed at the time (Hack 2001, 304).

If any communities in Malaya were to accept the British vision of an independent Malaya that would be "...liberal-democratic in its politics, non-communal in its ordering of society, and pro-capital in its approach to socio-economic organisation" (Loh, Liao, Lim & Sen 2013, 30), then they would first have to be weaned off older Diasporic affiliations with erstwhile "motherlands." In this way, "Malayanization" was also a response to the failure or the Malayan Union project of 1948, which had seen Malay ethno-nationalism quash hopes for the granting of equal rights to Chinese-born residents of the region (Carstens 2005, 148).

"Malayanization" entailed a range of new programs and institutions. Chief amongst these was the MCA. Established in February 1949 as a new political entity led by what Donald Nonini (2015, 36) has termed the "anti-communist Chinese bourgeoisie," the MCA represented an attempt to foster a vision of a "Malayanized" Chinese identity that had been articulated by voices on both the Left and the Right prior to the war (Belogurova 2015). The MCA would also fill the political vacuum created by the banning of the KMT in Malaya in the same year (Yong & McKenna 1990), and would assist colonial efforts at the forced resettlement of rural Chinese communities—a key strand of colonial policy to counter the communist insurgency (Tan 2015).

Despite the existence of the MCA, the very officials who first championed a policy of "Malayanization" recognized the challenges inherent in its implementation. Writing in July 1949, Henry Gurney (then High Commissioner) suggested that the "...Malayanisation of the Chinese will be a long and difficult process in which wise guidance and help will be required at every step" (cited in Oong 1993, 252). Secretary of Chinese Affairs David Gray was even less sanguine. "Malayanisation," he lamented in 1953, "is not a particularly happy expression, and is not welcomed by the Chinese community..." It would have to suffice, however, for it was "...difficult to find an alternative expression which fits with the idea of turning Chinese thoughts away from China and building up a genuine desire to accept Malaya as their homeland and the subject of their loyalty" (IWM 1952, 41). The policy would only succeed with government intervention in fields such as immigration policy, citizenship, and Chinese-medium education. Educational reform, indeed, would be identified as the

"main method" through which "Malayanization" might ultimately be achieved (IWM 1952, 41).

"Sentimental patriotism for the motherland"

Following the founding of the PRC in October 1949, "Malayanization" took on a new urgency. If the perceived foe around which the program had been designed in 1948 had been an amorphous "China mindedness," after 1949 it became the appeal of "new China"—one which defined itself as anti-imperialist. It was in the field of education—and specifically within Chinese-medium schools in Malaya—that colonial fears about influence from the PRC were most immediate. As Tan Liok Ee (1997) has explained, the early 1950s was a period of intense debate about Chinese education, within wider discussions about what it would mean, come independence, to be "Malayan." This was also a period when a plethora of institutions and groups emerged to voice divergent views about the place of Chinese-medium education in a decolonizing Malaya. These included everything from conservative, communal approaches, to educators such as Lim Lian Geok, who articulated "...an alternative vision of the Malayan nation which emphasized that its acceptance of its multi-ethnic, multilingual, and multicultural characteristics was essential to interracial integration" (Tan 1997, 96). At the same time, many Chinese-medium schools in both Malaya and Singapore became centers of radical student politics in this period, much of it articulated in openly anti-colonial terms (e.g., Lee 2011). Indeed, Chinese middle schools remain at the heart of some of the most contentious debates about the political history of the period even today (cf. Ramakrishna 2015, 34-45).

While the place of Chinese education in a decolonizing Malaya, and the rise of student radicalism in Chinese schools, were both complex developments which defy reduction to a single cause, they were, in each case, linked to the question of perceived PRC influence—at least from the perspective of the colonial state. Firstly, in the early 1950s, virtually all Chinese-medium schools in Malaya were using, in the absence of other materials, textbooks and reading material produced in the PRC or Hong Kong. For this reason, the Chinese Secretariat initiated a program for the production of alternative teaching and reading materials in 1952 (Tan 1997, 65). In these efforts, especially when it came to schools in rural areas, the colonial state solicited the support of the MCA. Working in coordination with local Chinese Affairs Officers, the MCA sourced Chinese-language reading materials for New Village libraries and schools, particularly from American agencies such as USIS.[1] Indeed, the MCA received funding for this purpose from the colonial authorities (ANM 1952), as well as directly from the CIA-backed Asia Foundation, which had opened an office in Kuala Lumpur early in decade (HIA 1953). In addition, the MCA established, from 1952 onwards, a working relationship with Hong Kong-based "Third Force" (*Disan liliang*) Chinese *émigrés*—i.e., itinerant Chinese intellectuals who professed loyalty to neither the Chinese Communist Party or Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists. The most important of these was the Union Press (UP) (Youlian chubanshe), an Asia Foundation-financed organization headquartered in Kowloon (Mark 2004, 190-3). UP publications from Hong Kong were already being sold in Singapore bookstores by early 1952 (TNA 1952). More importantly, however, and through the MCA's help, UP were supplying "all the Chinese books for...New Village Libraries practically at cost"

by 1953 (ANM 1953). In addition, it was UP which was commissioned to publish "Malayanized" textbooks for Chinese-medium primary schools in Malaya—also from 1953 (TNA 1954d).

Despite such measures, as well as a vigorous program of interception of posted material (Harper 1999, 292-3), many textbooks used in Chinese-medium middle schools in Malaya continued to originate "outside Malaya" by the middle of the decade. These remained "narrowly Chinese," in the view of colonial officers, and thus undermined "Malayanization" (TNA 1953a). It was one thing to control the flow of books into New Village schools; it was quite another to curb the circulation of PRC textbooks in urban areas.

The problem was compounded by the very nature of the material in question. On the one hand, many Chinese-medium middle schools in Malaya used mainland Chinese-published teaching materials that had been produced *prior* to 1949. Such material contained no overtly Maoist content, but rather May 4th nationalism, with an emphasis on iconoclasm and anti-imperialism. Such material could not be banned as "communist," for it predated the founding of the PRC; at the same time, because it included the writings of some of the most widely respected authors in modern Chinese literature, banning such material risked accusations of anti-Chinese (as opposed to anti-PRC) bias. In the context of the Emergency, however, May 4th literature proved arguably even more of a problem than post-1949 tracts, for such literature took on an entirely new relevance. As one contemporary observer phrased it:

> The vacuum in their [i.e., students at Chinese schools] political education has, so far, been filled, to an undesirable extent, by their reading and misinterpretation of the

> works of authors such as Kuo Mo Jo, Lu Hsin and Mao Tun [sic]....The literature, so dear to our students, is saturated with political polemics of little practical value in China and of no relevance, but taken out of context a considerable danger in Malaya (BOD 1955c).

More problematically, such content was complemented by increasing numbers of publications which praised the material achievements of "new China" since 1949—without necessarily calling for revolution. Books detailing PRC industrial, agricultural, and manufacturing output, or describing the geography and architecture of "new China," were all included in this category.

The threat posed by this "new China" propaganda was considered so serious that it was discussed at the Mallaig Conference of December 1954, at which British colonial governors from across the region met in Singapore to discuss intelligence and security matters. At that meeting, a report entitled "Chinese Education and Nationalism in Chinese Schools" was tabled by Singapore's Chinese Secretariat. While detailing the events surrounding the National Service riots which had occurred in Singapore that same year (cf. Tan, Tan & Hong, 2011), the report suggested that such events were "...only symptoms of the general situation in the middle schools." Noting the lack of leadership within the Chinese community itself (in the absence of the KMT), the Secretariat suggested that:

> It was probably inevitable that the new nationalism, directed towards communist China, should come to the fore among the students...and the emotional appeal of the new, resurgent China, was bound to have its effect sooner or later in the Chinese Middle Schools

(TNA 1954c).

The fear was, perhaps predictably, that this "emotional appeal" could be exploited by Malayan communists for local advantage. Little wonder then that the Colonial Office tried various programs to stop such material at source in Hong Kong. Solutions included innovative censorship methods such as the "postal route," which would allow the Hong Kong authorities to stop publications of PRC provenance passing through their territory without such items ever needing to be officially "banned" in Hong Kong itself—thus avoiding the ire of Beijing. The drawback of such an approach was that it required the micromanagement of posted materials, and would never alleviate the problem of having to define what a "subversive publication" was in the first place. Such an approach was, unsurprisingly, not welcomed by officials in Malaya (TNA 1954b).

Recent scholarship on the PRC's "overseas Chinese" (*qiaowu*) policies in the early to mid-1950s suggests that these colonial fears were at least partially justified. While many earlier studies have emphasized PRC policy regarding citizenship of compatriots abroad, the overseas Chinese "...remained a frontline force for Beijing's interests abroad..." in the 1950s (To 2014, 61). And as Ren Guixiang and Zhao Hongying have shown, for example, specific policies were put in place to produce reading materials for dissemination to such communities which would "...promote the nation-building and achievements of the motherland, and unite the overseas Chinese masses through patriotic spiritual education" (cited in Ren & Zhao 1999, 266). This is precisely what tracts praising the developmental achievements of "new China" did in

Malayan schools.

With Hong Kong's reluctance to impose measures that might upset the PRC, the problem grew more acute. In a report on "The problem of subversion in Chinese Schools in the Federation" compiled in September 1955, for example, Singapore's Chinese Secretariat lamented the fact that so many students at Malayan Chinese-medium middle schools were choosing publications from or about "new China" in favor of those extolling Malaya. Such material was engendering a "sentimental patriotism for the motherland" or (in an unusual colonial turn of phrase) the growth of a kind of "Chinese Islam"—i.e., a sense of spiritual loyalty to China which transcended the quotidian issues of citizenship (BOD 1955b).

By this time, however, it was noted that such publications were not "undesirable" because of their potential utility for Malayan communists, but rather because of their ability to undermine colonial attempts at "Malayanization." In addition, such material was believed to be encouraging Chinese students from Malaya to travel to the PRC for study, as many were undoubtedly doing in the absence of higher education opportunities in Malaya itself.[2] Ironically, colonial authorities even recognized that the attraction of People's China was so strong that it undermined Malayan communism (as much as it threatened colonial policy): "We have an unusual, though ineffectual ally in the Malayan Communist Party," remarked one Chinese Affairs official wryly, "which wants its adherents to stay in this country" (TNA 1953b)—i.e., and not travel to China. This is a point that Victor Purcell (1954, 134), noting the stark differences in aim between the PRC government and the MCP, would also note at the same time.

External developments also conspired against colonial hopes. The Geneva Conference of 1954 and the Bandung Conference of 1955 have long been presented as a collective turning point in relations between China and Southeast Asia—the start of PRC attempts to establish itself as a cultural leader of the "non aligned world" (e.g., Chen 2009). Significantly, however, the subsequent emergence of a presentable and pragmatic PRC occurred at precisely the same time as—in the words of the then High Commissioner in Malaya, Donald MacGillivray—"...the pall of fear which lay upon the country [i.e. Malaya] two or three years ago has lifted," and the military fortunes of Malayan communism were on the wane (TNA 1955a). China's mid-1950s rise, in other words, coincided with Malayan communism's mid-1950s decline.

The sheer speed in which this change of fortunes was experienced by colonial officials tasked with monitoring "the Malayan Chinese" is perhaps best illustrated by the rapidly shifting assessments of the issue by the then Secretary of Chinese Affairs Frank Brewer. When first evaluating "Chinese reactions to events in east Asia" in late 1954, Brewer had expressed a relatively relaxed view of PRC influence. While acknowledging that many Chinese in Malaya "...cannot conceal their pride that China can at last command the attention of other nations," Brewer also concluded that, "...outside events do not command so much attention...", and that "internal affairs will provide a focus and interest which will counterbalance the distraction from Malayanisation caused by China" (TNA 1954a). Contrarily, however, Brewer seemed far less confident in a report on the "Chinese problem" in Malaya he penned less than six months later. While maintaining a positive attitude towards "Malayanization," Brewer was now far more circumspect about the role of the PRC as a new variable in

Malayan politics. Those in Malaya who sought to maintain feelings of loyalty with China were now finding succor, he admitted, in "the appeal of Communist China herself now that she has emerged as a World Power..." (BOD 1955a).

By 1956, the blame for this problem was being laid squarely at Hong Kong's door. The issue was discussed again at Mallaig that year (TNA 1955b). On this occasion, however, there was far less patience with the approach adopted by Grantham's Hong Kong. Indeed, Hong Kong's emergence as "a base for the distribution of Chinese communist publicity material" was deemed such a threat that an internal report on the problem was initiated by the Colonial Office (TNA 1956b). Particularly vocal in their criticism of Hong Kong's "complacency" were figures such as the MI5 officer Alex MacDonald (c.f., Walton 2013, 245-6), who advocated greater controls over imports from Hong Kong into all British territories, while stressing that any attempt to produce what he termed "alternative pabulum for the young Chinese mind" would never be successful if tighter controls were not put in place by the Hong Kong authorities (TNA 1956b)

Colonial officials struggled to find an effective means of curbing such trends short of direct censorship. They lamented the fact that "...anything which now comes from Red China, whether it be films, songs or fountain pens, is eagerly sought after by the younger Chinese...". In other words, "Communism *and* the new Chinese 'culture'," were now both judged to "..represent the same danger to Malaya" (TNA 1956c).[3] "[The] difficulty arises...", mused one September 1956 report:

> ...over publications or films produced in communist China which cannot in conscience be held to contain Communist propaganda. The most that can be charged

> against them is that they are propaganda for China under its present government. They have the effect of attracting the minds and loyalty of the people of Singapore towards China and away from Malaya. For this reason such publications are undesirable and their import and circulation should, if possible, be stopped (TNA 1956c) .

It was in this context that an effective blanket ban on material published by dozens of PRC publishers was introduced in Malaya under the *Control of Imported Publications Ordinance* in late 1958, and a similar blanket ban on proscribed PRC and HK-based (pro-PRC) publishers was introduced in Singapore just a few months later.

The Union Press in Malaya

Up to this point, my story has been one of colonial reactions to the perceived threat of (initially) May 4th nationalism and, from late 1954 onwards, Chinese cultural nationalism, in Malayan schools. Such reactions ranged from the enlisting of local organizations such as the MCA in sourcing new reading material to outright censorship. As I have already hinted above, however, colonial responses could be just as proactive as reactive. Indeed, they covered a range of more clandestine activities designed not just to restrict access to PRC cultural production, but also to foster rival media in its place. Significantly, just as Hong Kong had proven to be the proverbial thorn in the side of colonial Malayan censors, so too did Hong Kong emerge in the mid-1950s as the source of a possible remedy.

At the end of 1954—just as the post-Geneva "rise of China" was beginning to be

noticed in Malaya—the beginnings of a more comprehensive program to counter PRC influence began to be explored. This was initiated not at the Colonial Office, but by sections of the Chinese Secretariat in Malaya and their allies within the MCA. This program involved the deployment of the very same "Third Force" intellectuals in Hong Kong who had been commissioned to produce textbooks for Malayan schools a few years earlier, but to a far greater degree.

UP had started operations in Hong Kong in January 1951, and was associated with the wider "Third Force" movement led by the US-based intellectual Carsun Chang (Zhang Junmai). In Hong Kong, UP collected intelligence on the PRC; it published essays, novels, and magazines deploring the state of life on the mainland; and it sought to:

> cooperate with congenial organisations and persons, to influence the overseas Chinese communities, to educate (in the broadest sense of the word) the Chinese youths in the Free World, particularly in Southeast Asia (Union Cultural Organisation, 1955).

UP cultural workers professed a dislike of both communism *and* KMT authoritarianism, while expressing a desire to build "...a new China, based upon the principles of democratic constitutionalism" (Chang 1952, 14). More importantly, UP had proven itself capable of producing Chinese-language cultural products which looked progressive without being pro-PRC. Its periodical *Student Weekly* (*Xuesheng zhoubao*), which commenced publication in Hong Kong in 1952, proved highly popular amongst student groups both in that city, and in other parts of the

Chinese-speaking world, including Southeast Asia (Shen 2017, 591).

Probably the best known UP intellectual was Maria Yen (a.k.a. Jane Chiu; a.k.a. Yen Guilai; a.k.a. Qiu Xihong). Some of Yen's polemic essays on student life in post-1949 Beijing had been translated into English by USIS staffers and published through Macmillan in 1954 under the title *The Umbrella Garden* (Yen 1954). It was this collection which led colonial officials in Southeast Asia to view Yen's *oeuvre* as precisely the sort of "pabulum" which needed to be circulated amongst young readers in Malaya (BOD 1955b).

As early as 1952, "Third Force" intellectuals had been feted in the region by official circles, and the idea of using such figures for the purposes of cultural work in colonial Southeast Asia was articulated in print by Frank Brewer in early 1955 (BOD 1955a). Brewer would take a leading role in promoting this "Overseas Byzantium outside the red empire" over the following year or more (TNA 1956a).

However, it was thanks primarily to individuals within a newly assertive MCA, particularly Leong Yew Koh—a founding member of the MCA, head of its Publicity Sub-committee, and (according to British security officials) an "ex-KMT intelligence officer" (TNA n.d.)—that such ideas would be realized in the mid-1950s. He had also been directly involved in MCA debates with Malayan Chinese community groups over Chinese-medium education in 1953 (Tan 1997, 140). This may explain why it was Leong who proposed directly, though secretly, to Donald MacGillivray in late 1954, the idea of employing UP intellectuals in Southeast Asia "...in the field of sabotage as a means of stemming and disrupting Communist influence and subversion" (TNA 1955c).

In the context of the perceived crisis in Chinese schools, Leong's proposal was acted upon. Indeed, MacGillivray seemed particularly open to the notion of talented propaganda workers who "could speak to the Chinese youth in the spiritual language they understand"; UP also appears to have appealed to British suspicions about Chinese politics, for "they [i.e., UP cultural workers] lack a disciplined fighting force or typical Chinese self-seeking power group to support them." In other words, in British eyes, UP would be entirely malleable (TNA 1955c).

Consequently, in December 1954, the UP editor Yu Tak-foon (Yu Deguan; a.k.a. John Paul Yu) arrived in Singapore with an official invitation from the office of the High Commissioner, the financial backing of the Asia Foundation, and a six-month resident visa (TNA 1955b). Yu's visit—unpublicized at the time, and organized with the assistance of Hong Kong's Public Relations Office—was undertaken ostensibly to explore the possibility of producing a version of *The Student Weekly* for local consumption. It is almost certain, however, that the visit occurred as part of wider attempts to control the popularity of PRC-friendly media (HIA 1954a). Indeed, Asia Foundation accounts of Yu's work in Singapore read as a carbon copy of colonial sentiment of the time: " ...how important we [i.e., the Asia Foundation] feel it is to do something about the almost total absence of sources for people in Malaya who are forced to rely willy nilly, on materials either from the [Chinese] mainland or Leftist in inspiration." (HIA 1956)

Yu met with supporters of the "Third Force" during his stay in Singapore, such as Frank Brewer, as well as with anti-communist student groups in that city. He then proceeded to travel up the Malay Peninsula, being chaperoned on his travels by Leong

Yew Koh. On the completion of his tour, Yu secured an agreement with the colonial authorities for a small band of his peers from Hong Kong (including Maria Yen), to relocate to Singapore the following year, and to start work there with Asia Foundation funding. By January 1955—a month after Yu Tak-foon's initial visit—the group had opened its own publishing house in Singapore (NAS 1955), the first of a series of corporate entities associated with UP which would operate in Southeast Asia through the 1960s. "Guidance" was provided to UP by the Secretary for Chinese Affairs, who acted as a liaison between the group and various arms of the colonial state, though all parties ensured that such links were kept entirely secret—even from groups such as the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the MCA's Alliance partner (BOD 1959).

Given UP's Asia Foundation backing, it would be tempting to view this foray into colonial politics as little more than a footnote in the wider story of the American use of anti-communist intellectuals in Diasporic Chinese communities during the Cold War (cf., Peterson 2016). The evidence suggests, however, that colonial plans to counter Chinese media from the PRC with an overtly Malayan cultural identity were impressed upon UP from the very start. The "guidance" provided by both Frank Brewer and Leong Yew Koh, clearly helped steer UP in a direction wholly in keeping with colonial policy. This was even noted by the Asia Foundation, which bemoaned the fact that colonial officers "...had too great an influence on UP here [in Malaya]" (HIA 1959).

It was also on his original tour of Malaya with Leong Yew Koh that Yu Tak-foon appears to have experienced something of a Malayan epiphany, shifting from an

initial "anti-communist" stance (typical of UP work published in Hong Kong in the first half of the 1950s), to an overtly "Malayanized" approach. "I realized that a new nation was being formed," wrote Yu shortly after discussions with Leong:

> ...the independence of Malaya seems inevitable, and she will be a very important country in Southeast Asia. If she is not properly guided, she may turn out to be a second Indonesia...so we should help the Malayan Chinese Association (HIA 1954b).

As Shen Shuang has revealed (2017), the UP did initiate a local version of the *Student Weekly* in Southeast Asia. The group's work went beyond this, however. Within a year of Yu Tak-foon's arrival in Singapore, UP had expanded significantly. Its staff of over 200 people in the city produced a whole gamut of publications—from musical scores to novels—most clearly aimed at a youth market, and all seemingly designed in deliberate response to the challenge posed by PRC publications. In a detailed report penned by UP staff in Malaya in June 1956, the organization noted the "soft-going strategy" that had been adopted by the PRC since Geneva, as well as UP's plans for expansion into the postcolonial era to counter this continuing threat. Such plans ranged from the establishment of bookstores (for the distribution of "Free World literature") and printing presses in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur, to drama troupes, youth camps, and orchestras (HIA 1956)—indeed all manner of "alternative pabulum for the young Chinese mind" that British officials were asking for at this very time.

This 1956 report also contains an important note, however, about the "Malayanization" of UP—and UP's support of "Malayanization"—for the group's most effective endeavors in this period were not simply those which reflected

standard "Third Force" ideology. While recent studies have suggested that this represented a case of the UP "morphing" to fit local conditions (Shen 2017, 604), such developments mapped directly onto colonial desires to encourage Malayanization in the lead-up to Merdeka. Indeed, it was within this context that UP's most long-standing cultural legacy needs to be re-examined.

The much celebrated *Chao Foon* (*Jiao Feng*) was a literary magazine produced by UP specifically for a Chinese-speaking youth readership in Singapore and Malaya. It remains, to this day, one of the most celebrated fora for Malay(si)an Chinese literature, and has inspired numerous dissertations and essays (e.g., Lim 2013). Its first issue was published in late 1955. Seldom commented upon in the academic literature, however, was the fact that its (Chinese) language was "dumbed down" to cater for what UP perceived to be a lower standard of Chinese comprehension on the part of Southeast Asia-based readers (HIA 1955a). The magazine was also instructed by both the Asia Foundation and the colonial state to be "completely dissociated publicly from the Union Press," and neither obviously anti-communist (lest it betray its origins) nor critical of colonial or Alliance (i.e., UMNO-MCA) policy (HIA 1955b).

Most importantly, however, *Chao Foon* adopted an overtly "Malayanizing" agenda, supporting writers who worked on local (i.e., Malayan) topics, yet not overtly challenging government policy on "Chinese affairs." Indeed, it defined itself as a "purely Malayanized literary magazine," for which "mass appeal is essential" (HIA 1955c). This meant not simply bringing Malay vocabulary into its prose, publishing essays extolling the virtues of "Malayan-mindedness," or even celebrating local

landscapes and forms of expression—though *Chao Foon* did all this. It also meant directly undermining forms of expression that were associated with the PRC (e.g., social realism); at the same time, *Chao Foon*'s editors turned PRC-inspired cultural production on its head by labeling the work of May 4th authors (i.e., those whose writings had so vexed colonial officials earlier in the decade) "neo-colonial" (Lim 2013, 159).

Chao Foon remains, to this day, one of the most celebrated sources of *Mahua* literary history. It is commonly cited in studies of Sinophone cultural expression in Malaysia (e.g., Tee 2013). Indeed, it is precisely the "Malayanized" content of the journal (devised under the guidance of the colonial state, an American propaganda agency, and the MCA), which is lauded by scholars working in comparative literature. Choon Bee Lim (2013), for example, argues that *Chao Foon* represented an attempt to create a new form of Sinophone literature, which sought to "... 'politically and culturally liberate' Chinese literature in Malaya..." (159) While not discounting the anti-communist ideology inherent in UP's origins, such assessments overlook the role played by the colonial state and its local allies in enabling *Chao Foon* to be published in the first place (and to continue to be published while non-Malayan rival publications were banned). Nor is there sufficient acknowledgement in such work of the motivation of the colonial state in initially encouraging *Chao Foon*'s publication—i.e., anxieties about the threat to "Malayanization" posed by PRC influence in Malayan schools.

In a retrospective report dated 1959, William Watts—the last colonial deputy secretary of the Interior and Justice in the Federation of Malaya—reflected on the role

that UP had played in the closing months of British rule. While noting the delicate position of a clandestine group of Chinese intellectuals continuing to operate in a post-British Malaya, Watts was effusive in his praise for UP and its products (such as *Chao Foon*). Admitting the limits of colonial planners in combating PRC "subversion," Watts painted a picture of a late colonial state which might well have lost its battle against PRC influence in the mid-1950s had it not been for its "Third Force" allies*:*

> It became apparent that the Union Press Group provided the most valuable instrument if not the only one in combating communist influence among the Chinese educated and increasing use was made of their services over a wide range of activities (BOD 1959).

Conclusion

Scholars have done much to "decolonize" the history of decolonization in Southeast Asia in recent decades. As a result, we now rarely read histories of the period written purely from the perspective of the departing colonial powers. In the desire to explore new identities and ideas which emerged as a result of decolonization, and to broaden the lens beyond the sorts of sources that once typified fields such as imperial history, this "postcolonial turn" has generated important local perspectives on hitherto "imperial" questions.

However, such an approach has also tended to downplay the importance of cultural developments emerging in this period which are not easily defined as forms of "resistance." Indeed, the adoption by anti-colonial voices of the "Malayanization"

agenda has tended to blind scholarship to the colonial (and Cold War) use of this "unhappy expression." At the same time, colonial attempts to deny "sentimental patriotism for the motherland" a place in Malaya's decolonization has, ironically, been perpetuated in recent attempts to undermine the notion of Diaspora when it comes to studying Chinese-language cultural expression in Cold War Southeast Asia—although, to be sure, such attempts are now being challenged, including in the pages of this very journal (e.g., Chan 2015).

Recent scholarship has acknowledged a "...Cold War information order in the making of independent Singapore and Malaya" (Loh, Liao Lim & Seng 2013, 257). However, I would argue that this order went far beyond the more obvious manifestations of Cold War politics. Late colonial fears about the influence of "new China" on young Malayan minds led to policies designed to wean local communities away from Diasporic identities, while supporting new "Sinophone" Malayan identities in their place. Some of the cultural by-products of such policies, all be they far removed from their original purpose and political context, are still with us today. To reveal this need does not undermine claims to quite different forms of "Malayanization"—including those which were constructed in opposition to (British) colonial hegemony (e.g., Khor 2007). They do, however, introduce an important, and often overlooked variable into the story of key institutions, from the MCA to *Chao Foon*, which remain at the heart of current debates about identity formation in Malay(si)a in the late-colonial period.

What I hope this paper has revealed is not just how fragmented Britain's imperial response to a resurgent PRC was in the 1950s, but also how remarkably successful

colonial responses designed to counter that perceived threat eventually proved to be—especially when these involved marshalling local elites (e.g., the MCA) in colonial endeavors. Furthermore, I hope to have demonstrated how a focus which moves beyond the "Malayan-ness" of "Malayanization"—i.e., which considers the key roles played by refugee intellectuals from Hong Kong; British Secretaries of Chinese Affairs; and cultural products from the PRC—can shed light on aspects of this period which tend to have been marginalized in much recent scholarship.

That being said, the "cultural Cold War" approach which I have adopted in the present study cannot tell us everything. And now that a wider array of colonial and Cold War interventions are being uncovered by researchers in the archives, it is perhaps time to return to the very texts which animated colonial anxieties in the first place with this new contextual picture in mind. Recent theoretical forays into cognate debates suggest that "cultural Cold War" studies must also remain cognizant of "Cold War culture"—i.e., "...patterns of behaviour, attitudes and structures of thought and meaning associated with the Cold War" (Johnston 2010, 307). If, as Catherine Gunther Kodat (2015, 11) persuasively argues, "Cold War culture deserves a fuller accounting," then the account of "Malayanization" provided in this paper represents only part of the story. Future research will hopefully go further in re-analyzing PRC-published textbooks and *Chao Foon* essays (as well as their reception, consumption, and interpretation in Malaya) with such an approach in mind, rather than just the colonial policies which controlled or encouraged their circulation in the first place. New readings of "Malayan" textbooks and literary magazines (to say nothing of film, music, or visual art) as "Cold War culture," may challenge the

tendency to reduce late-colonial cultural production in Malaya to expressions of the "Sinophone" and manifestations of cultural resistance against cultural hegemony (be that of British or PRC origin). They may also assist us in identifying hitherto unforeseen connections between the "revisionist" scholarship of Emergency violence and the "cultural history" of late-colonial Malaya, while bringing Malaya itself back into the history of Asia's "cultural Cold War."

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[1] As Frey (2003, 547) notes, Malaya was the only territory in Southeast Asia in this period in which USIS did not provide "military and financial assistance" to the authorities. Instead, it appears that USIS provided "in kind" support to New Villages.

[2] This was one of the factors behind the campaign for Chinese-medium higher education, and the founding of Nanyang University in 1956 (Stockwell 2009).

[3] The emphasis on "and" here is my own.