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CHINESENESS AND THE COLD WAR

CONTESTED CULTURES AND DIASPORA IN
SOUTHEAST ASIA AND HONG KONG

Edited by
Jeremy E. Taylor and Lanjun Xu



Chineseness and the Cold War

This book explores contested notions of “Chineseness” in Southeast Asia and Hong Kong during the Cold War, showing how competing ideas about “Chineseness” were an important ideological factor at play in the region. After providing an overview of the scholarship on “Chineseness” and “diaspora”, the book sheds light on specific case studies, through the lens of the “Chinese cultural Cold War”, from Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaya, Thailand, Indonesia and Vietnam. It provides detailed examples of competition for control of definitions of “Chineseness” by political or politically oriented forces of diverse kinds, and shows how such competition was played out in bookstores, cinemas, music halls, classrooms, and even sports clubs and places of worship across the region in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. The book also demonstrates how the legacies of these Cold War contestations continue to shape debates about Chinese influence – and “Chineseness” – in Southeast Asia and the wider region today.

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Archival abbreviations

CICM	Archives of the Congregatio Immaculati Cordis Mariae, Rome
HILA	Hoover Institution Library & Archives, Stanford, CA
NACP	National Archives College Park, MD
NAP	National Archives Philadelphia
SMA	Shanghai Municipal Archives
TNA	The National Archives, London

Introduction

Putting “Chineseness” back into Cold War cultures¹

Jeremy E. Taylor

Introduction: Cold Wars, old and new

In 2019, the notion of a “new Cold War” between the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and “the West” began to be discussed by journalists and scholars alike.² US-China economic “decoupling”, alleged PRC subversion in the politics of numerous countries around the world, and accusations from the PRC about supposed foreign backing of protests in Hong Kong all contributed to a sense that China was entering a new period of conflict with the United States and its allies. The Covid-19 pandemic, the introduction of the National Security Law in Hong Kong and continued wrangling over trade only enhanced such arguments in the following years.³

Much of the discussion surrounding this “new Cold War” in places such as the United States, Europe and Australia has focused on PRC public diplomacy and Chinese influence in educational and cultural institutions abroad, often (though not exclusively) amongst “overseas Chinese” communities. Clive Hamilton’s books *Silent Invasion* and *Hidden Hand*, for example, have highlighted PRC influence in universities, the Chinese-language media, and Chinese diasporic organizations in Australia and Europe, respectively.⁴ Similarly, the *Chinese Influence and American Interests* report, published by the Hoover Institution in 2018, details the ways in which “Beijing has more recently been seeking cultural and informational influence” in the United States.⁵ In other words, the debate about this apparent “new Cold War” is not focused purely on geopolitics. It also has a distinctly cultural dimension.

What is remarkable about the current debate, however, is that it pays relatively little attention to the “original” Cold War of the 1950s and 1960s. To be sure, some commentators deplore the recycling of rhetoric associated with the anti-communism of the post-war decades and reject the current use of the expression “Cold War” for this very reason.⁶ Others argue that “there never was a Cold War China” in the first place.⁷

However, in decrying the extent of PRC influence in “the West”, or underlining the apparent ahistoricism inherent in the application of the words “Cold War” to current tensions, we risk overlooking the fact that at least one aspect of those current tensions, namely fear of PRC cultural influence abroad – and attempts

by Chinese governments to influence Chinese-language media and overseas Chinese cultural organizations – is nothing new. The current accusations of divided loyalties amongst Chinese communities outside of China or of covert PRC cultural influence abroad sound remarkably similar to those that were aired in earlier periods, including in the immediate post-World War II decades. This is particularly true in one region of the world in which China’s influence continues to be felt most acutely (thanks to new policy developments such as the Belt and Road Initiative) – Southeast Asia.⁸

Southeast Asia has long been home to some of the largest communities of Chinese heritage outside of China and Taiwan. Ethnic Chinese communities have represented (and still represent) very significant “minorities” in many parts of this region.⁹ At the same time, the period we call the “Cold War” represented a time of intense and rapid change in this region, with the “reincorporation of new nation states into the Cold War geopolitical order and the world capitalist economy”¹⁰ and Cold War rivalries overlapping with major armed conflicts. Scholars such as Christopher Goscha and Christian Ostermann have even argued that “the Cold War and de-colonization collided most intensely at first in Asia”, making this region unique.¹¹ Often overlooked in such literature, however, is the extent to which China and questions of (diasporic) “Chineseness” lay at the heart of many of the conflicts and debates that emerged in Cold War Asia. This was a period, after all, when conflicts such as the First Indochina War (1946–1954) and the Malayan Emergency (1948–1960) were often linked in some way to either the arrival of “new China” as a regional power or to questions of Chinese identity in the region. And as a new generation of scholars is now suggesting, the fissures, conflicts and rivalries that erupted during the Cold War had long-lasting consequences for those countries of Southeast Asia that were (and still are) home to significant overseas Chinese communities (e.g., Indonesia).¹²

It is our assertion in this book that the convergence of various political, cultural and demographic factors made questions of “Chineseness” central to the Cold War in Southeast Asia, but also (and conversely) that the Cold War was foundational to competing notions in this region of “Chineseness” – many of which are still with us today. In order to better understand this, the editors of this volume believe it is time to pose direct questions about how the fear (and admiration) of PRC cultural influence across Southeast Asia in the 1950s and 1960s determined both official and popular attitudes towards diasporic Chinese communities in the region. We also believe that a comparative and interdisciplinary examination of the ways in which cultural workers and consumers in Southeast Asia responded to such developments is necessary. How did debates over what a future China *and* Southeast Asia might look like manifest themselves in the literature, music, cinema, education and religious practices that were produced, circulated or consumed in communities that either identified as or were labelled as “Chinese” in Southeast Asia from the 1950s through to the 1970s? And how did such debates lead to new formations or understandings of what it meant to be “Chinese” outside of China? These are all questions that contributors to this volume address

through case studies featuring Hong Kong, Singapore, Malay(si)a, Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand and, just as crucially, the region as a whole.

Cold War cultures in Asia

Cold War studies has emerged as a vast field of enquiry over the last three decades. Encompassing everything from international relations to cultural studies, the field now claims its own journals, research centres, conferences and canon. It encompasses everything from “the architecture of Hilton hotels as well as the Berlin Wall, American kitchen technology no less than American sovietology” to “Latin America’s domestic conflicts just as much as the Kremlin’s grand strategy”.¹³

Despite the sheer volume of research that is conducted under this rubric, however, there remains some confusion about what is actually meant by the expression “Cold War”. The Cold War can be understood as a period (or “moment”), an ideological conflict and/or a condition. Indeed, studies of the Cold War often cover all of these approaches. As Heonik Kwon notes, for instance:

The term *cold war* refers to the prevailing condition of the world in the second half of the twentieth century, divided into two separate paths of political modernity and economic development. In a narrower sense, it means the contest of power and will between the two dominant states, the United States and the Soviet Union.¹⁴

In this collection, we have allowed for a broad approach which enables contributors to deploy this expression in any of these ways as appropriate to their individual case studies. For some contributors, therefore, the Cold War may refer, in an almost denotative fashion, to a wider temporal frame which overlaps with decolonization, revolution and independence.¹⁵ To view the Cold War as primarily a “period” does not undermine its significance to discussions about “Chineseness” and “diaspora”, however. As Shuang Shen argues, for instance, “The reason that the Cold War is worth revisiting . . . is that the Chinese diaspora was an important although hitherto-neglected site of cultural production during that period”.¹⁶

For other contributors, however, the Cold War is interpreted in this volume as an ideological and/or geopolitical conflict (or set of conflicts), though one that was far more complicated than the regular characterizations of a dichotomized Cold War world might suggest. Political rivalries between a US-aligned “Free World” and the countries of the communist bloc were certainly real, but these were not the only source of fissure. Thanks to a number of recent collections, we now have a clearer sense of the importance of local agency in Cold War politics in the region. Karl Hack and Geoff Wade, for example, have argued that:

The “Southeast Asian Cold War” was constituted by local forces drawing on outside actors for their own ideological and material purposes, more than by great powers seeking local allies and proxy theatres of conflict. . . . The great powers did not simply instruct or manipulate local partners as orthodox

accounts suggested. Nor did local parties merely react to local events, and use the international line as a convenient dressing.¹⁷

While Hack and Wade's analysis focuses primarily on Asian communist parties (and their autonomy from Moscow), their underlying argument has nonetheless found support in more recent studies of local Asian actors of both the Left *and* the Right. Tuong Vu, for instance, reminds us of the importance of Asian "Indigenous elites" – often broadly nationalist in political persuasion – who had risen to prominence all over the region during World War II and who challenged returning European colonial powers for hegemony in the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁸ As we shall see later, many such "Indigenous elites" played a key role in promoting the "non-aligned" movement, which was arguably more pivotal in Asia than in any other part of the world.¹⁹ Similarly, Charles Kraus has highlighted the agency of "anti-communist Asia" – i.e., Asian anti-communist governments and parties that were allied with, but often operated independently of, the United States.²⁰

Another major contribution of this Asia-centric scholarship has been to note that the Cold War followed a parallel yet very different trajectory in Asia from the ones it followed in other parts of the world. In the view of Odd Arne Westad, for instance, the Cold War in Asia started not with geopolitical stalemate in occupied Berlin, but with the outbreak of the Chinese Civil War in 1946.²¹ For Hack and Wade, the start of the Malayan Emergency in 1948, and the establishment of the PRC the following year, were foundational events for the Cold War in Southeast Asia.²² Many of the key turning points that define the Cold War in Asia are different from those experienced elsewhere. If the Atlantic world has its Berlin Airlift of 1948–1949, Asia has its Dien Bien Phu of 1954 and Bandung Conference of 1955.

The Asian experience during the 1950s and 1960s was also different given the fact that the Cold War overlapped with both decolonization and the persistence of a non-Asian presence in the region via colonialism and foreign occupation. This included not just some of the largest US military bases in the world (such as those in the Philippines and Okinawa),²³ but also British colonial possessions such as Hong Kong which emerged (as many contributors to this volume show) as a key site for debates about "Chineseness" in Cold War Asia. Indeed, Hong Kong is mentioned in the very subtitle for this volume in light of its strategic importance for various groups who sought to promote contested visions of "Chineseness" in the post-war decades.

In stressing the local agency of individuals and organizations in Cold War Asia, therefore, it is important to bear in mind the persistent influence of European colonial powers, the United States and even supposedly non-political forces in shaping events in the region. Indeed, while Tony Day's assertion that the Cold War in Asia was "driven by regional historical imperatives as much as by global forces" remains entirely valid, we must also acknowledge the significant amounts of funding and energy that went into fighting communism on the part of various non-Asian powers in Southeast Asia.²⁴ Many of the political, social and cultural developments that we associate with the Cold War in Asia were not, in other words, purely Asian projects.

In challenging the Eurocentrism of the existing Cold War studies field, we also caution against overlooking the many theoretical and methodological contributions that scholars of the Atlantic world have forged and which continue to shape the study of the Cold War in Asia. Nowhere is this clearer than in the application of ideas such as the “cultural Cold War” and “Cold War culture” – both products of the so-called “cultural turn” in Cold War studies that was witnessed in the 1990s.²⁵

In a curiously under-cited article, the historian Gordon Johnston stresses the importance of distinguishing between the “cultural Cold War” and “Cold War culture(s)”. Johnston argues that the study of the “cultural Cold War” involves analyzing “the range of ways in which high and popular cultures were produced, deployed, interpreted and challenged”. The study of “Cold War culture”, on the other hand, “poses a broader set of questions about patterns of behaviour, attitudes and structures of thought and meaning”.²⁶ Scholarship produced since Johnston’s article has emphasized the need to assess both the “cultural Cold War” and “Cold War cultures” together – i.e., to consider both Cold War texts *and* the means through which these texts were produced, circulated, consumed or interpreted.²⁷ This is an approach we have actively sought to emulate in this collection, in which a number of chapters explore the cultural policies and infrastructure that enabled “Cold War cultures” to be circulated in Southeast Asia, while others adopt a “cultural Cold War” perspective.

Methodologically, the study of Cold War cultures in Europe has started to have a demonstrable impact on the cultural history of Asia. Frances Stonor Saunders’ ground-breaking book *Who Paid the Piper?* remains the template for numerous archive-based studies of the cultural Cold War in Asia, for example.²⁸ An exciting new body of scholarship which involves research into US-backed or -financed organizations in the region, such as the Asia Foundation and USIS, informs us of just how much seemingly apolitical Cold War culture was, in fact, highly politicized.²⁹ This volume follows in the footsteps of such work, with a number of chapters interrogating the role of purveyors of anti-communist literature and broadcasting, others underlining the role of British colonial authorities in places such as Singapore and Malaya, and one even exploring the role of the Vatican in attempting to define and nurture an overseas Chinese Catholicism in the 1950s and 1960s.

Probably the most important finding to emerge from the work of scholars of Cold War Europe is the argument that “the Cold War was formative rather than merely contextual”.³⁰ The Cold War, whether it be seen as a period or a set of ideological battles, shaped the ways in which people saw the world, interpreted history and expressed themselves. This is why we have taken a decidedly cultural approach in this volume, rather than limiting our discussion to geopolitics. The Cold War did not merely entail major armed conflicts and political rivalries, but also the movement of people, ideas, stories, images, songs and beliefs across political and cultural borders. It was not just land and resources that were contested, but cultures as well.

To be sure, a new generation of scholars is already beginning to note the centrality of the Cold War in shaping and contesting cultural expression in Cold War

Asia. For Xiaojue Wang, for instance, the establishment of the PRC in 1949, and the subsequent relegation of the Republic of China (ROC) to Taiwan, defined not just the nature of Chinese literature in the 1940s and 1950s – “at no other time in . . . the twentieth century”, she argues, “was modern Chinese literature endowed with a heavier political responsibility” – but even the ways in which “modern” and “contemporary” Chinese literature (both in China and beyond) has been defined ever since. By looking at literature and culture (rather than high politics or international relations) in the Chinese context, Wang argues that we can start to question not just the consequences of the PRC-ROC divide, but also the very terms that remain central to the study of Chinese literature, such as “nation” and “narration”.³¹

As such an approach suggests, a self-consciously Asia-centric reading of Cold War texts and cultural practices demands that we rethink our use of a particular lexicon also. As Tony Day notes, for example:

The meaning of words like “communist”, “nationalistic”, or “modern” that are now used to describe cultural processes during that time [i.e., the Cold War] must be reconnected to the ways in which they were debated during the Cold War in Asia.³²

To Day’s list, the editors of this book would add the common yet highly contested terms “Chinese” and “diaspora”.

Chineseness, diasporas and the Cold War

Many critiques of the notion of “Chinese diaspora”, and associated terms such as “the overseas Chinese”, have been published in recent years. Scholars such as Shu-mei Shih have spent a great deal of energy dismantling “diaspora”, suggesting that this term’s use assumes cultural and experiential homogeneity amongst vastly different communities; “reinforces the Western and other non-Western . . . racialized constructions of Chineseness as perpetually foreign”; and overlooks “the ample evidence of the desire of . . . immigrants to localize within their lands of settlement”.³³ Shih’s much-cited criticism of “diaspora” is one that understands this term as representing, in Arif Dirlik’s words, “extensions of the national interests and cultures of origin”.³⁴ In the case of a “*Chinese* diaspora”, such a conceptualization means that the very use of the term is comparable to attempts by Chinese governments to exert control over those deemed to be “overseas Chinese” – the same control that has been at the heart of debates over the “new Cold War” (with which I started this Introduction). It is for this reason that Shih has been so adamant about promoting, in place of “diaspora”, the notion of “the Sinophone” – a category that “encompasses Sinitic-language communities and their expressions (cultural, political, social, etc.) on the margins of nations and nationalness”.³⁵

In fields such as comparative literature, the development of Sinophone studies has been instrumental in shifting the focus of the study of such “Sinitic-language communities” away from China *per se*, and in demonstrating how (what we, in this

book, continue to call) “Chineseness” need not always be tied to China. Indeed, the influence of this scholarly movement can be felt in the shape of the present volume. In the accounts of “Chineseness” that emerge in the following chapters, the editors have quite consciously chosen to marginalize (without excluding) the two governments that battled each other for the mantle of “China” in the period we now refer to as the Cold War. In this volume, cities such as Hong Kong and Singapore are granted arguably (and quite deliberately) more prominence than Beijing or Taipei – though New York, London and Rome also feature as sites of intervention in the Cold War creation of competing notions of “Chineseness” within these pages.

In other respects, however, this book acknowledges the extent to which a number of scholars have started to write back against the Sinophone in recent years, often doing so by refining or enlarging earlier definitions of the “[Chinese] diaspora”. For example, drawing on the theoretical work of William Safran, Lingchei Letty Chen suggests that there *is* room for a “diasporic consciousness” that can co-exist with what are now described as “Sinophone” identities. “The Sinophone writer”, according to Chen, “carries with him or her imprints of the diasporic experiences passed down for generations”, even when any sense of longing for a “lost homeland” has diminished.³⁶ Other scholars have stressed the “expansive potential of diaspora” as a concept once it is disconnected from the nation-state. The historian Steven B. Miles, for example, responds to accusations about assumptions of homogeneity by suggesting that we speak of (the plural) “diasporas”. In doing so, Miles suggests we can examine “specific [diasporic] trajectories from emigrant communities in China to destinations of migration”, rather than a single multinational “community”. Importantly, Miles points out that the very notion of a “Chinese diaspora” began to emerge from the late nineteenth century onwards as “successive Chinese states emphasized the ‘Chineseness’ of the Chinese”.³⁷ In other words, the “Chinese diaspora” may well have been a historical construct – and one used by Chinese governments to control erstwhile citizens and their descendants outside of China – but that is precisely what makes it an important variable in the cultural histories that we write of Southeast Asia.³⁸

The argument recently put forward by the historian Shelly Chan about diaspora being viewed as “less a collection of communities than a series of moments in which reconnections with a putative homeland take place” is also useful, and this is an approach we have been cognizant of in this volume. Chan’s call to view diaspora through the lens of temporality makes particular sense when analyzing cultural conflicts and developments that occurred across Southeast Asia from the late 1940s through until the mid-1960s.³⁹ In this period, rival national and colonial authorities (from Beijing to Kuala Lumpur) labelled individuals and communities throughout the region “[overseas] Chinese”. Many of these same authorities also maintained departments, agencies or organizations to manage, study or engage with these same people. Competing forces in the region imagined a contiguous diasporic community which maintained links with either the PRC or the ROC, based partly on the extensive intra-Asian movement between communities in the region that historians of migration and trade have long noted. Many

nation-state-based histories of “the overseas Chinese” in Southeast Asia have chosen to present a narrative of emigrant communities overcoming exclusion in societies emerging from colonial rule, presenting the Cold War as a transitional period in which exclusion started to be overcome and presaging later periods of acceptance and integration.⁴⁰ Yet in doing so, some have overlooked the fact that the Cold War resulted in the emergence of contested notions of Chineseness that have displayed remarkable longevity.

The editors of this collection would argue that the period between the end of World War II through until the start of the Cultural Revolution in China in 1966 (though perhaps also later than this) represented what Chan refers to as a “diaspora moment” – a moment when links between specific communities and individuals throughout the region, and contested imaginings of a Chinese “motherland” (and of Chineseness without a “motherland”), were being explored and challenged. This was also a period when a particular sentiment that colonial officials in the region referred to as “China-mindedness” was not simply still relevant, but was undergoing a renaissance in response to the rise of the PRC and the concurrent emergence of various new postcolonial forms of ethno-nationalism throughout the region as a whole.⁴¹ To reference Shu-mei Shih’s much-cited phrase, we argue not that diaspora has an “end date”,⁴² but rather that we might think of diaspora as a concept that was re-interpreted and contested at various moments throughout the modern era.

Moreover, while “diaspora” and “the overseas Chinese” are discursive constructs, they are constructs that many organizations and individuals throughout the region directly engaged with in the two decades following 1945, and which had major ramifications for the cultural and personal lives of millions of people in the region. This was not simply a result of “overseas Chinese affairs” (*qiaowu*) policies imposed on people of Chinese ancestry by various national and transnational authorities.⁴³ Equally, it was a direct result of the rise in a number of countries of new, postcolonial national identities that were imagined in direct contrast to internal “Others” (which often, though not always, meant “the Chinese”).⁴⁴

The period between the late 1940s and the mid-1960s was a time when writers, musicians, performers and other cultural workers began to experiment with new identities and forms of expression – including those to which some scholars have since attached the adjective “Sinophone”. And it is certainly true that some “Sinophone writers and artists” in this and other parts of the world “sought to resist the surturing call of Chineseness from China”.⁴⁵ But as some of the chapters in this volume highlight, many other “Sinophone” writers and artists continued to explore “Chineseness” in a variety of ways in this very same period. Indeed, as Steve Miles puts it, the “disruptions in diasporic trajectories” that the Cold War tightening of political borders engendered “accelerated this trend towards ruminations on how diasporic Chinese fit into host societies”.⁴⁶

To reduce an examination of the cultural history of “Sinophone” Southeast Asia to forms of cultural expression which overtly rejected “China” and “Chineseness” – and to dismiss the very real and continued influence of rival Chinese governments and other organizations that held fast to the notion of a “Chinese

diaspora” – would be ahistorical.⁴⁷ Indeed, even if we acknowledge the important role of Southeast Asia-based intellectuals and agents in the creation of new “Sinophone” forms of cultural expression during the 1950s and 1960s,⁴⁸ we cannot divorce such developments from the reach of distinctly *Chinese* (i.e., PRC and ROC) nation-states and their attempts to mould communities in the region in their own image. As recent scholarship has also shown, many of the best-known vehicles for the celebration of “Sinophone” culture were themselves products of Cold War contestations, at a time when the appeal (and fear) of a resurgent China was tangible.⁴⁹

The Chinese cultural Cold War in Southeast Asia

While the Cold War itself inspired an entire body of literature exposing supposed Chinese communist techniques of international subversion, a scholarly interest in CCP “conspiracies” has been replaced in the last decade or more by a renewed fascination with the cultural ramifications of “socialist internationalism”. Much of this work is inspired by a wider interest in the “diverse forms of international entanglements” that were experienced within the “Second World” in Europe in the same period.⁵⁰ This can be seen in the increased scholarly emphasis on “South-South” relations in Cold War Asia, especially those that were articulated at the Bandung Conference of April 1955 in Indonesia. Characterized by Hong Liu and Taomo Zhou as a “starting point for previously voiceless Afro-Asian nations to demand autonomy during the Cold War”, the political, diplomatic and intellectual implications of the “Asian-African Conference” at Bandung, has generated an entire field of study in its own right.⁵¹ The “Bandung moment”, as Christopher Lee calls it, is presented in much of this scholarship as an inherently positive and hopeful one – a model not just for Afro-Asian “non-alignment”, but for a post-colonial historiography that puts what we now call the “global South” at the centre of analysis.⁵²

Within this emerging field of “Bandung studies” is an increased attentiveness to the PRC’s emergence in the 1950s as a cultural power in Asia. Writing against earlier attempts to stress the *Chineseness* of Chinese communism – a notion shaped by the “China-centred” historiography of the 1990s⁵³ – this scholarship focuses on the role of the PRC in shaping socialist internationalism. In contrast to the emphasis on the “humanism” of Bandung, this work has stressed the pragmatic attempts by the PRC in the early 1950s to use Bandung as a means of spreading influence.⁵⁴ This was clearly the case with certain forms of cultural production that could claim mass appeal, such as cinema.⁵⁵ Such efforts were not always as “internationalist” as they appear, however, for they included not just the export of recognizably “socialist” culture, but also of suitably reformed “folk” and regional forms of Chinese cultural expression designed to appeal to diasporic audiences.⁵⁶

A good example of scholarship which recognizes this distinction is a recent collection of essays published in *China Perspectives* under the title “Cultural Imagining of the Cold War”, and edited by Lingchei Letty Chen. Focusing on PRC cultural exports in the 1950s and 1960s, Chen suggests that “Our understanding



Figure 0.1 Handbill for *Qilu yinghao* [Shandong Circus Comes to Town] (dir. Zhao Yishan, 1965) – a Hong Kong-produced film celebrating the exploits of acrobats in the PRC – distributed by the Odeon Theatre in Penang (RCLOS 791.4361095/957/ COL, National Library Board, Singapore).

of China’s socialism-communism . . . needs to be squarely situated within the Cold War context”, for almost every cultural product exported beyond China’s borders in this period was in some way shaped by an unfinished war between the CCP and its Nationalist rivals in Taipei, as well as by a desire to market the benefits of the PRC (as a homeland, a socialist state or a regional power) to various audiences (including, but not limited to, those deemed to represent the Chinese diaspora).⁵⁷

A number of chapters in this volume follow Chen’s lead in examining the export of PRC-made books, songs and films in the 1950s and 1960s. On the whole, however, we have aimed to stress the complex provenance of a good deal of Cold War “Chinese” cultural production. Indeed, rather than simply reading the story of “Chineseness” in Cold War Asia as being a story of PRC (or ROC) influence, we acknowledge Meredith Oyen’s observation that the overseas Chinese “were pulled at least three ways” during this period, and that the Cold War “conflict in Asia was far from bipolar”.⁵⁸ In addition, we have consciously chosen to move beyond the current scholarly fascination with socialist internationalism by recognizing the “internationalism” of what Chien-wen Kung has called “diasporic anticommunism”,⁵⁹ as well as other articulations of Chineseness that did not “buy into” the PRC project.



Figure 0.2 Photograph of an anti-communist demonstration in a Malayan town, circa 1950s (Ministry of Information Collection © Imperial War Museum, K19321).

For example, a number of chapters in this volume draw on the now burgeoning academic literature on the role of the United States in producing, circulating, censoring and distributing Chinese culture, particularly via proxy organizations in Hong Kong in the 1950s. While Christina Klein’s groundbreaking work on American paternalism *vis-à-vis* Asia was first articulated in *Cold War Orientalism*,⁶⁰ in more recent years an increasing scholarly emphasis has been placed on the role of American and US-funded agencies and organizations which vied with their PRC rivals for cultural influence in Asia. Recent work on the “weaponizing” of Chinese literature by American agencies in the 1950s, for example, has shown not just how US propaganda bodies funded Chinese intellectuals to produce anti-communist pabulum for a transnational readership, but also how many of these intellectuals maintained a high level of autonomy.⁶¹ Such research has paved the way for studies of American propaganda operations and their attempts to court diasporic audiences via pictorials, broadcasting, literature and other media.⁶² This work on the US-financed Chinese cultural production in “Free Asia” (much of it actually produced by so-called “Third Force” intellectuals who had fled the mainland in 1949), has been important in balancing the on-going focus on “socialist internationalism”. This has updated an earlier literature on the part played by other anti-communist centres of power, particularly the Taipei-based ROC, in financing and supporting international cultural production in this same period.⁶³

And, as Shuang Shen notes, it has highlighted the fact that “articulations of ‘Chineseness’ . . . [were] . . . connected to a ‘trans-Pacific’ context” rather than being “‘internal to the Chinese world’”.⁶⁴

What makes this volume unique, however, is its application of what the editors have previously referred to as the “Chinese cultural Cold War”.⁶⁵ This is a



Figure 0.3 “Huanle, qiliang” [Entertainment and desolation]. Poster with contrasting depictions of commercial cinema-going in “Free Asia” and life under communism. Produced by USIA, 1950–1955 (Courtesy of the National Archives, College Park, MD; file no. 306-PPA-40).

paradigm that suggests a multi-polar competition (during a “diaspora moment”) for control of the notion of “Chineseness” itself, and for the cultural control of multiple communities across Southeast Asia that were either defined as, or who self-identified as, “Chinese”. We argue that this “Chinese cultural Cold War” – which, like the wider cultural Cold War in Asia, went far beyond a simple Left-Right dichotomy and overlapped with new forms of postcolonial nationalism and the persistence of European and American power in the region – was foundational to ideas of Chineseness that remain important in Asia today, even when they are challenged by new concepts such as the “Sinophone”.

On the one hand, this Chinese cultural Cold War represented an extension of the unfinished Chinese Civil War on the mainland, with diasporic communities beyond China being targeted (as they had been in the pre-1949 era) by competing Chinese governments. It overlapped, however, with the rise of various forms of ethno-nationalism in Southeast Asia, many of which found in minorities of Chinese heritage either a cause for suspicion or an excuse for racism and exclusion. It was also shaped by the rise of the United States in this region and the residual influence of European powers.

We argue that this conflict, though never referred to as a “Chinese cultural Cold War” at the time, was self-evident to many of the characters and institutions who are featured in this book, including even those who chose to react against officially sanctioned definitions of a “Chinese diaspora”. This conflict was played out on a daily basis in bookstores, cinemas, music halls, classrooms, places of worship and homes all over Southeast Asia in the 1950s, 1960s and, indeed, the 1970s. And as the subtitle of this volume suggests, it involved contesting various forms of cultural expression.

In one sense, then, this volume aims to revisit debates about “diaspora”, the “Sinophone” and “Chineseness” with the benefit of hindsight, but also with new tools, perspectives and sources. In doing so, we do not suggest that current terms such as “Sinophone” are redundant, but merely that “Chineseness” and “the Chinese diaspora” were highly relevant and consequential concepts. Such terms defined the “Chinese cultural Cold War” just as the Cold War shaped them.

The structure of the book

Chineseness and the Cold War: Contested Cultures and Diaspora in Southeast Asia and Hong Kong includes nine chapters, spread over three thematic sections. The first of these sections, entitled “Chineseness and ‘new China’ in Cold War Southeast Asia” unpacks the importance of actual and perceived PRC influence in places such as Malaya, Singapore and Thailand during the Cold War. Lanjun Xu’s analysis in Chapter 1 of the export of films from the PRC to Hong Kong and Southeast Asia, for example, sheds light on the complex interaction between PRC propaganda, cultural diplomacy and film-going in Cold War Asia. Based on recently declassified archival materials, oral histories, film studio records and press coverage, Xu investigates not just the production and circulation of such films, but also the ways in which supposedly



Figure 0.4 “Yaomo de mori” [Last days of the devils]. Poster attributed to a Taiwanese student called Wu Mingxiu, and depicting the destruction of two devils – one labelled “Mao Zedong and Zhu De”, and the other labelled “Korean communists” – by Guan Gong, the Chinese god of war, 1949–1952 (Courtesy of the National Archives, College Park, MD; file no. 306-PPA-81).

commercial products based on “reformed” Chinese traditions could promote a vision of “new China” that appealed to a variety of audiences outside the PRC. Rather than simply promoting socialist internationalism, PRC agencies fully utilized diasporic Chinese nostalgia and native-place ties as they sought

to distribute a vision of their China as both a socialist *and* a “traditional” homeland for the overseas Chinese.

In Chapter 2, Choo Chin Low adopts a quite different perspective. The regulatory changes to citizenship laws governing the status of “overseas Chinese” throughout Asia following the Bandung Conference have been presented in the past as a victory for notions of “localization”, integration and acceptance for erst-while “outsider” communities. Yet in Low’s study, these legislative changes to the definition of “the Chinese” in Malaya in the 1950s demonstrate how the dismissal of “dual citizenship” in that society was driven largely by colonial fears about divided loyalties amongst sections of the Chinese community – especially given the context of the Malayan Emergency – and the spectre of a rising China. As Low shows, the resulting distinction between “Malayans” and “Chinese” continues to shape politics in Malaysia today.

Wasana Wongsurawat’s Chapter 3 is similarly informed by fears about PRC influence and the impact of such fears on defining and controlling the “Chinese” in Thailand. She takes a broader view of the entanglement of “Chineseness” and the “red scare” in Cold War Thailand, arguing that the status (and very definition) of “the Chinese” in Thailand has long been linked to external security concerns and fears about the reach of Chinese communism (and domestic struggles over what it meant to be “Thai”). However, as this chapter also shows, the very notion of “Chineseness” in Thailand evolved in parallel with shifting geopolitical trends in the wider region, including but not limited to conflicts in Vietnam and Cambodia.

If PRC influence defines the book’s first part, it is “anti-communist Chinese-ness” that characterizes the three chapters in the second section. In keeping with the volume’s aim of writing against the over emphasis on Chinese socialist internationalism, this section includes contributions on individuals, groups and organizations which sought to promote forms of cultural and social mobilization that were designed in opposition to communism amongst overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia.

For Mei Feng Mok (Chapter 4), such anti-communist sentiment is viewed through the lens of organized sport. Mok shows us how organized sport led by diasporic Chinese organizations in the Republic of Vietnam helped to consolidate a sense of solidarity between communities in Saigon-Cholon and places in other parts of the “Free World” (and anti-communist Asia), such as Taiwan, Hong Kong and Japan. In doing so, Mok not only demonstrates how anti-communist diasporic nationalism strengthened transnational links across certain communities that defined themselves as “Chinese”, but also how the theoretical developments emerging in the literature on sport and the Cold War can shed entirely new light on the Chinese cultural Cold War in Asia.

In contrast, Kenny K. K. Ng (Chapter 5) explores the realm of popular literature and print culture, as he focuses on the lives and work of Chinese authors employed by American-backed agencies in Hong Kong, such as Liu Yichang. The subjects of Ng’s chapter travel along similar anti-communist networks to those detailed in Mok’s contributions – especially those linking Hong Kong with Singapore and Malaya. Yet they do so with the spectre of Malayan and Chinese communism

always in the background, exploring in their fiction possible new futures for the region which are not necessarily dominated by a connection to socialist China. Ng illustrates how Cold War frameworks for expressing “Chineseness” could borrow just as much from Hollywood templates as from Chinese ones.

The role of American-backed Chinese cultural workers is carried through into Jeremy E. Taylor’s Chapter 6, which examines the much understudied role of Voice of America (VOA) and its programme of international broadcasting in Chinese dialects in the early 1950s. Based largely on the broadcast scripts that were produced at VOA’s New York offices in the early 1950s, this chapter traces the development of different dialect “desks” at VOA – many catering to the same audiences that Mok’s sporting associations and Ng’s pulp fiction authors targeted at the same time – as this broadcaster promoted American values and news to listeners both in the PRC and throughout Asia. Taylor shows how the desire of American VOA executives to create and subsequently maintain new audiences defined by provincial Chinese origin and dialect resulted in this broadcaster promoting forms of diasporic Chinese nationalism (and parochialism) that were sometimes at odds with VOA’s more general message of American exceptionalism. American anti-communist radio broadcasting was also regularly dressed in the garb of supposedly “folk” Chinese cultural traditions – much as the films of PRC provenance explored in Xu’s Chapter 1 were.

The cross-border broadcasting illustrated in Taylor’s Chapter 6 lays the foundation for the theme of the final part of the book: “Border-crossing ‘Chineseness’ in Asia”. All three chapters in this last section explore the extent to which ideas, ideologies and (Chinese) texts crossed highly controlled political, geographic and social borders in Cold War east and Southeast Asia; and also how “Chineseness” was itself an inherently border-crossing idea during the Cold War. Herein lies an important point that the editors of this volume are keen to highlight: despite the often monolithic definitions of “Chineseness” that were imposed on communities by governments throughout Asia (and beyond) in this period, cultural workers and consumers explored new ways of articulating (and at times rejecting) “Chineseness” and “diaspora”, even in the face of opposition from Chinese governments, Southeast Asian nation-states and colonial or Western powers.

Indonesia is the starting point for this final section of the book, with Josh Stenberg’s Chapter 7 turning the usual story of cultural flows from the PRC to Southeast Asia on its head. As Stenberg shows, Indonesian songs from a variety of musical genres moved across Asia (and specifically between Indonesia and places such as the PRC, Hong Kong and Taiwan) throughout the Cold War, shaping not just what Chinese music sounded like, but also Chinese, Indonesian and “Chinese Indonesian” identities. While the songs that Stenberg examines are not always overtly ideological in content, the changing geopolitics of Cold War Asia influenced the movement of such songs with sometimes surprising results. As Stenberg argues, however, the “transformations, adaptations, distortions” of songs also demonstrate “the insufficiency of hard or absolute conceptions of cultural barriers” during the Cold War. While Indonesia had a unique relationship with the PRC in the 1950s and 1960s, for example, the movement of songs between

these two countries (during an era in which both countries were seeking to define themselves as leaders of the non-aligned world) suggests a complex circulation of cultural expression that expanded and sometimes contradicted official notions of “Chineseness” in both places.

Jeremy E. Taylor’s Chapter 8 on the Holy See’s Apostolic Visitor to the Overseas Chinese (AVTOC) – a position created in the 1950s and based in Singapore for the first few decades of its existence – also explores the transnational movement of ideas, texts and beliefs, though in this case in the form of religion. While the AVTOC was very much a Cold War invention (having been created to provide pastoral support at a time when the Vatican was wary of PRC influence amongst Chinese Catholics worldwide), the notion of an overseas Chinese Catholicism as promoted by the AVTOC was tied both to a pre-1949 China and to a supranational church. In the end, the Vatican’s view of a “border-crossing” overseas Chinese Catholicism was undermined by the rise of ethno-nationalism in various parts of Southeast Asia, such as that examined in the chapters by Low (Chapter 2) and Wongsurawat (Chapter 3), as well as by the tremendous political changes that were being experienced in societies that were home to significant overseas Chinese Catholic communities, such as Vietnam (as explored in Mok’s contribution).

This final section (and the book) ends with Pei-yin Lin’s exploration (Chapter 9) of “Chineseness” and “diaspora” as expressed in the literature of the Taiwan-based authors Pan Lei and Deng Kebao, both of whom use the notion of “diaspora” to open up reflective spaces for political critiques. For both these authors (one of Vietnamese birth; the other writing of the experience of KMT soldiers in Burma), an allegiance to the Cold War anti-communism espoused by officialdom in Taipei offered a chance to critique Cold War geopolitics. Yet the border crossing inherent in the lives and literature of these writers could also undermine the “one China” nationalism of the regime with which they were ostensibly aligned. If the book starts with Xu’s exploration of the export of “traditional” Chinese cultural forms from the PRC then, it ends with Lin’s thoughtful interrogation of the export of “diaspora” from writers associated with Cold War Taipei.

Through these three themes, *Chineseness and the Cold War* thus covers a variety of cultural forms (literature, music, cinema and broadcasting), as well law, religion and politics. Rather than promote a single argument about “Chineseness”, contributors have each adopted a range of perspectives and approaches. There are, however, a number of points that bring all of the chapters into dialogue with one another. While this book does include studies of PRC or Nationalist influence, and while “new China” is present in some form in virtually every part of the book, all authors have placed either Southeast Asia or colonial Hong Kong at the centre of their studies. Much as promoters of the new “Sinophone studies” have done, the contributors to this volume have shown how “Sinophone” cultural production need not always be defined purely in relation to some imagined or remembered “motherland”.

At the same time, however, most of the scholars featured in this book have engaged directly with notions of “diaspora” – even when they recognize that such notions are themselves constructs which often served distinctly national and even

exclusionary ends. It is our hope that these chapters will, in fact, help to demonstrate the extent to which the Cold War might be seen as a “diaspora moment”, a time when contested notions of “diaspora” not only mattered, but defined how people imagined themselves and their communities.

Finally, all chapters in this book acknowledge the foundational nature of the Cold War – be this defined as a period, a conflict or a condition – for competing ideas about “Chineseness” across Asia over the longer term. The complex set of overlapping conflicts that were experienced throughout various communities in the region in this period, and that the editors of this book refer to as the Chinese cultural Cold War, did not result in the creation of a single definition of “Chineseness”. They did, however, represent the starting point for many of the debates and controversies that still animate the cultural politics of the region today. At a time when speculation about a possible “new Cold War” between the PRC and its adversaries is emerging, it is crucial that we look back to this earlier period, if only to better understand the histories of the terms we use to navigate “Chineseness” outside of the PRC today.

Notes

- 1 I thank Lanjun Xu for comments and suggestions on earlier versions of this Introduction.
- 2 Niall Ferguson, “The New Cold War? It’s with China and it Has Already Begun”, *New York Times*, 2 December 2019, accessed 20 February 2020, www.nytimes.com/2019/12/02/opinion/china-cold-war.html.
- 3 Stephen M. Walt, “Everyone Misunderstands the Reason for the U.S.-China Cold War”, *Foreign Policy*, 30 June 2020, accessed 20 July 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/30/china-united-states-new-cold-war-foreign-policy/>.
- 4 Clive Hamilton, *Silent Invasion: China’s Influence in Australia* (Melbourne: Hardie Grant, 2018); Clive Hamilton and Mareike Ohlberg, *Hidden Hand: Exposing How the Chinese Communist Party is Reshaping the World* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2020).
- 5 Larry Diamond and Orville Schell, *Chinese Influence and American Interests: Promoting Constructive Vigilance* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution, 2018), www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/chineseinfluence_americaninterests_fullreport_web.pdf.
- 6 Kevin Rudd, “U.S.-China Relations in Perspective with Hon. Kevin Rudd”, Speech, 7 November 2019, Asia Society, San Francisco, accessed 30 July 2020, <https://asiasociety.org/northern-california/hon-kevin-rudd-us-china-trade-war>.
- 7 Covell Meyskens, “There Never was a Cold War China”, Sources and Methods Blog, Wilson Center, 9 September 2020, accessed 15 December 2020, www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/there-never-was-cold-war-china.
- 8 On the effects of the BRI on PRC policies towards the “overseas Chinese”, see Xue Gong, “The Belt & Road Initiative and China’s Influence in Southeast Asia”, *Pacific Review* 32, no. 4 (2019): 635–65.
- 9 Dudley L. Poston Jr. and Juyin Helen Wong, “The Chinese Diaspora: The Current Distribution of the Overseas Chinese Population”, *Chinese Journal of Sociology* 2, no. 3 (2016): 348–73.
- 10 John T. Sidel, “Nationalism in Post-Independence Southeast Asia: A Comparative Analysis”, in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism*, ed. John Breuilly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 472–94.

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