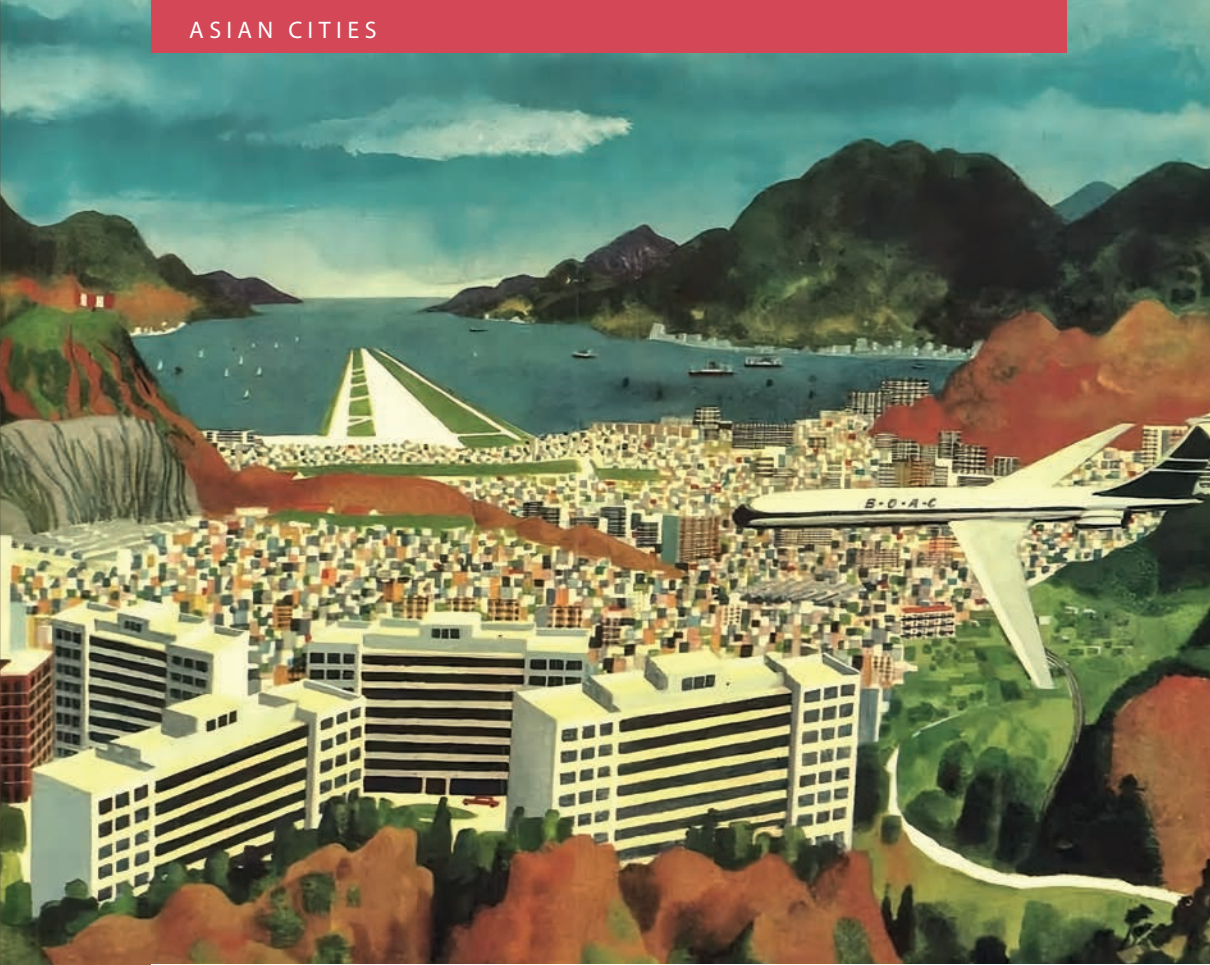


ASIAN CITIES



Edited by Tze-ki Hon and Ying-kit Chan

# The Cityscapes of Taipei, Hong Kong, and Singapore during the Cold War

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## The Cityscapes of Taipei, Hong Kong, and Singapore during the Cold War



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*Edited by  
Tze-ki Hon and  
Ying-kit Chan*

Amsterdam University Press

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# Introduction: The Cold War through the Lens of Taipei, Hong Kong, and Singapore

*Tze-ki Hon and Ying-kit Chan*

Historians live in the present but write about the past. Over the last two years, the sixteen of us who contributed articles for this volume witnessed a world ruptured by the vitriolic rhetoric of a new cold war. Combined with the COVID-19 pandemic and the fear of rampant inflation and energy crunches, this rhetoric divides the world into camps and alliances, creates boundaries and borders, and converts former global hubs and nodes into flashpoints of contestation. The rhetoric portends a bipolar system based on ideological differences, arms races, geopolitical rivalries, and contrasting leadership styles, not unlike what we saw in the Cold War (1947–91). At this time, we do not know how this rhetoric will unfold. Nor are we convinced that a new cold war will appear. But the heat of the rhetoric has triggered us—who live in different cities in East Asia, Southeast Asia, Europe, and the United States—to publish a collection of essays about the Cold War in East and Southeast Asia.

At the beginning, our task looked difficult. After a successful call for papers in March 2021, we found tremendous differences in our background, training, and perspective. Specializing in different parts of East and Southeast Asia, we had difficulty formulating a coherent argument that would cover the two regions under the theme of the Cold War. Certainly, there were similarities in the two regions in their responses to the hegemonic, bipolar system. At the same time, there were glaring differences in various parts of the regions due to their historical, cultural, and imperialistic legacies.

Soon, the rapid rise of temperatures in the new cold war rhetoric drew us together. When in real life we saw how a global economy was divided into demarcated zones and contested territories, we realized that seventy years ago similar events must have happened to create a bipolar system.

When in front of us we saw how former friends and allies became enemies and foes, we knew that similar arbitrariness and cruelty must have fallen upon people who were forced to choose sides. Pressed by the speed with which global geopolitics changed, we were united in our aim to make the complex story of the Cold War known to more people. We believed that this story—however imperfect in our telling—should remind us that we had been, and should be, a collective whole. Even during the Cold War, adversarial solidarities did not always dominate, and neither should they at present.

## Two Perspectives

In this volume, we examine the Cold War from two perspectives. First, we adopt the conceptualist approach to Cold War studies. That is, we do not see the outbreak of the Cold War as a product of an expansion of the Soviet Union (the orthodox approach), American imperialism (the revisionist approach), or a balance of power between the two superpowers (the realist approach).<sup>1</sup> Rather, we see the Cold War as a hegemonic paradigm that covered the entire globe, but had different impacts and implications in different places for different people.<sup>2</sup> As Odd Arne Westad observes, the conceptualist approach keeps the global competition of the two superpowers as the frame of reference, but it allows “a much wider variety of human agendas and processes of change intermingled in the conflict we now call the Cold War” (Westad 2010, 6). More importantly, Westad continues, “these agendas and processes center most often on domestic developments, but also on generational experiences and, in some cases, on international or even transnational or ‘imagined’ communities” (Westad 2010, 6–7).

Furthermore, this conceptualist approach is based on large numbers of documents found in archives across the globe. These primary sources show the enormous scope and scale of the Cold War, percolating from national capitals to quiet corners in residential neighborhoods. Rather than purely an ideological and military confrontation between the US and the USSR, Western and Eastern blocs, or NATO and the Warsaw Pact, Cold War historians now know it was a global balance of power that involved many players around the world, including Third World nations (Westad 2017, 1–18).

1 For the characteristics of the three approaches, see Westad (2010, 3–5); Daigle and Kalinovsky (2014, xxi).

2 For the significance of this approach, see Westad (2010, 1–19); Westad (2019, 1–18); Romero (2014, 691–701).

Historians also know that the Cold War affected the daily lives of millions of people in the name of economic development and technological progress, including how they lived and relaxed, where they studied and worked, what they saw on the silver screen and television, and where they bought their food and groceries (Brook et al. 2021, 1–31; O’Mara 2004, 17–97; Lorenzini 2019, 1–7). For this reason, the Cold War must be understood broadly as a way of life, a mode of thinking, or a vision of the future. Like a symphonic piece, the Cold War is the totality of a music; but within that music, there are discrete passages, distinct interludes, complex echoes, multi-layered counterpoints, and even momentary solos.

For us, the specialists of East and Southeast Asia, this complex view of the Cold War frees us from the straitjacket of the US-USSR confrontation, where the epicenters of the confrontation were situated far from the regions. In addition, the complex view of the Cold War allows us to see it as a series of events driven by interplays among different groups of players, ranging from the global and regional stakeholders to the national and local constituents. In this volume, we will focus on three cities—Taipei, Hong Kong, and Singapore—to underscore the commonalities and differences in East and Southeast Asia. We chose these three cities partly because of their pivotal positions in the migration routes of Chinese diaspora and the international trade networks that crisscrossed the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. We chose these three cities also because of their key functions as nodes of regional conflicts and cooperations after WWII.

As has been pointed out, the Cold War was a product of centuries of imperialism and nationalism (Westad 2010, 8–11; Duara 2011, 457–58). These three cities largely encapsulated the complexity of the Cold War as a realignment of imperialism and nationalism behind the façade of the rivalry of two superpowers. For instance, Cold War Taipei was at once a reterritorialization of the Chinese Nationalists (also known as KMT) over a former Japanese colonial space, and a reconfiguration of the KMT-controlled city into a site for expanding the US-led international anti-Communist bloc. Similarly, Cold War Hong Kong was characterized by three interwoven developments: a revitalization of British colonial rule after WWII, a continuation of the Chinese Civil War between the Communists and the Nationalists, and a frontier of the bipolar global rivalry. By the same token, Cold War Singapore went through four stages: (1) the return of British rule after Japanese occupation; (2) the national independence of Malaya in the late 1950s; (3) the establishment of the Republic of Singapore in 1965; and (4) its transformation into a US military base and a vibrant international city at the intersection of the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean.

By focusing on these three cities, we draw attention to the complicated legacies of imperialism and nationalism within the bipolar global system. While Taipei, Hong Kong, and Singapore were crucial nodes in the anticommunist information network, they had also been sites where imperialist and nationalist forces were reconfigured, resulting in a complex relationship with China—the dominant communist power in Cold War Asia. In addition, there were active, bottom-up resistances against various forms of control, challenging what Michel Foucault has called the “governmentality” of the state (Foucault 1991, 87–104; 1995, 35–69; Gordon 1991, 1–51). By encouraging our contributors to focus on the theme of anti-communism (which did not necessarily mean alignment with the US or capitalist model) and the interplaying networks (which connected East Asia and Southeast Asia to the rest of the world), we seek to uncover the unique roles that the three cities played during the Cold War. More importantly, in highlighting the complexity of Cold War history in Taipei, Hong Kong, and Singapore, we hope that readers will be more aware of the importance of agency (be it local or international) and the forms of resistance (be they overt or opaque) in these three cities, thereby enriching the conceptualist framework that seems poised to dominate the scholarship on Cold War histories.

Since we focus on cities, the concept of urban space is paramount in our discussion on Cold War Asian cities. In this volume, we adopt a host of categories to highlight the different aspects of urban space. They include: (1) cityscape (the overall landscape of a city), (2) memoryscape (a shared remembrance of the past based on spatial images), (3) mindscape (spatial images emerged from one’s mind), (4) moviescape (spatial images evoked through motion pictures), and (5) deathscape (spatial images connoted in cemeteries or on tombstones). We do not claim that these categories exhaust the possibilities of discussing the use of space in the three cities. Nevertheless, we believe that these categories add complexity to the understanding of urban space as both a physical object and a signifier. We hope that, through these spatial categories, we can highlight both the common characteristics of these three cities as frontiers of the bipolar global system and their differences as unique spaces embedded with complex meanings.

At the same time, these categories are discursive. They produce literary space in writing that renders meaning to its physical form. In what may be called a wordscape, concepts, terms, or words travel to ascribe new meanings to Asian cities otherwise untouched by hot proxy wars and direct military conflicts. As Chris Butler suggests, notwithstanding that it paradoxically not only alienates individuals from one another but also entraps them in their labor regimes, leisure offers cultural consumers of artistic or creative

works a counterspace that expresses their self-interests and informally restructures their physical space, even though this counterspace is illusory and manufactured (Butler 2012, 33, 101). For this reason, counterspace is amply discussed in the Taipei section of this book, whose chapters illuminate how Taiwanese writers, despite being under the influence of Cold War bipolarity, created a mental space to depict their lived structure or even ideal world in their minds. In this respect, comparative literature scholar Lydia H. Liu's idea of translanguaging practice—a process through which words are adopted, appropriated, and redeployed in other languages—helps us understand how and why neologisms were coined to accommodate old terms loaded with new meanings and novel concepts introduced by Cold War rivalries (Liu 1995, 1–44).

## Taipei

This volume consists of three sections. It begins with Taipei, the capital of Free China ruled by Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Party (KMT). During the Cold War, the city was a site of three competing but interwoven currents: (1) the legacy of Japanese colonial authority from 1895 to 1945; (2) the masculine prowess of the KMT after it relocated from mainland China to Taiwan in 1949; and (3) the alluring attraction of the US as the leader of a global coalition against Communism. These three currents undergirded the drastic changes in the cityscape of Taipei throughout the Cold War. They underpinned the tension and creativity in the arts (especially in novels and movies) that showed the possibilities of turning the same space into different uses at different times.

In Pei-yin Lin's essay that opens the section, we see how the three competing currents congregated in one site—a three-story building on 54 Nanhai Road. The building was originally used as the Taiwan Education Association under Japanese colonial rule. It was briefly used as the headquarters of the KMT's navy. But during much of the Cold War, it housed the United States Information Agency (USIA)—the nerve center for the people's diplomacy to win hearts and minds for the Western bloc. Fully aware of the complexity—if not the irony—of one building serving three masters, Lin offers a close study of the role played by the USIS in transforming Taipei into a site for the US-involved transnational anti-communist bloc. She focuses on the head of the USIS, Richard M. McCarthy (1920–2008), who turned Taipei into a hub of psychological warfare. This US influence, Lin argues, created opportunities and options for many young writers in Taiwan, who suddenly

had access to a trans-Pacific network reaching as far as the University of Iowa, McCarthy's alma mater.

These multiple layers of meaning of Taipei's cityscape also appeared in the prose of Pai Hsien-yung 白先勇 (or, in pinyin, Bai Xianyong)—the subject of the second article. A celebrated writer in Taiwan, Pai wrote many novels about his beloved city. As Hsiao-Hui Chang argues, in Pai's novels we find a transformation of Taipei's cityscape into a memoryscape depicting a conflict between the American form of Westernization and the Chinese style of patriarchal authoritarianism and Confucian moralism. Taking Pai's novels as signposts, Chang gives readers a mental tour of Taipei, covering the military dependents' villages, high-class residences, and entertainment districts, as well as Taipei New Park (which Pai identifies as a site for gays and lesbians). Through this literary/memory tour, Chang shows the proximity of these sites and their contrasting themes, making Taipei a diverse and vibrant city.

These conflicting images of Taipei are also found in novels by Eileen Chang, who called Taipei a frontier city. In Chia-chi Chao's essay, we find an account of how Eileen Chang (1920–95) developed her idea of Taipei (by extension, Taiwan) being a frontier of the Cold War bipolar system. For Eileen Chang—who grew up in Shanghai when the KMT ruled mainland China, moved to Hong Kong in 1952, and had settled in the United States since the mid-1950s—Taipei was a frontier in two senses. It was a frontier in the geopolitical sense of a land of freedom (Free China) in contrast to a land of captivity (Red China). At the same time, Taipei was a frontier in the temporal sense because it existed in the intersection between the past (the backwardness of East Asia) and the future (the economic advancement and technological prowess of the US).

In Mei-Hsuan Chiang's essay, the focus on Taipei is moved from novels to movies. Motion pictures played a crucial role in transforming cityscapes into metaphors to showcase Taiwan's economic power and the legitimacy of the Nationalist government. In Chiang's essay, we find the Taiwan movie director Bai Jingrui (白景瑞, 1931–97) being caught in the tension between serving the KMT in making propaganda movies and serving himself in presenting real life in Taiwan on the silver screen. In the article, Chiang praises Bai's healthy realist approach that dissected Taiwan's social problems and inserted dissenting voices from society. Thanks to Chiang's analysis, we see Bai's motion pictures as a moviescape where the tension between indoctrination and resistance was revealed.

If indeed the USIS in Taipei could serve as a symbol of American global leadership as Pei-yin Lin suggests, Taipei's mosques can be viewed

as gateways connecting Chinese Muslims to fellow Muslims around the world. In Janice Hyeju Jeong's essay that concludes the Taipei section, we learn that the Cold War was not completely a global rivalry between the Eastern bloc and the Western bloc; it was also a time when transnational religious networks developed, even though those networks had to adjust to the bipolar system. Looking at Taipei as the hub of overseas Chinese Muslims, Jeong connects the city to the intricate global networks of Muslims that centered in Mecca and extended across continents through vital nodes such as Cairo, Islamabad, Istanbul, and Jakarta. Religious figures (such as imams) formed the human connections that bound the global Muslim communities. In Taipei, the Grand Mosque on Xinsheng (New life) Road was the heart of the Chinese Muslim community on the island. It also served as the hub for overseas Chinese Muslims around the world. More importantly, it served as an unofficial conduit of the global Muslim community. By highlighting these intricate local, regional, and transcontinental connections, Jeong shows that religion played an important role in developing global connectivity during the Cold War.

## Hong Kong

In section two, we turn to Hong Kong. Like Taipei, Cold War Hong Kong was a site influenced by the confluence of various contesting and connecting trends. It was, first and foremost, a Japanese colony during WWII, and the return of British rule after 1945 meant that the colony had to be reterritorialized once again for postwar rehabilitation. While the reterritorialization was taking place, the Chinese Communist Revolution of 1949 transformed Hong Kong into a contest zone between the victorious Communists and the retreating KMT. To further complicate matters, the outbreak of the Korean War (1950–53) led to an embargo on China by the United Nations and the United States, effectively ending Hong Kong's traditional role as an entrepôt of China trade. All these factors contributed to Hong Kong's transformation into the Berlin of the East during the Cold War. Compared to Taipei, Hong Kong was even more clearly a frontline, because geographically it was located at the doorstep of Communist China just across the Shenzhen River.

This complex background of Cold War Hong Kong is the focus of Brian Tsui and Joseph Yu's essay. Focusing on Causeway Bay, a newly developed area on the eastern part of Hong Kong Island, the two authors highlight the convergence of two demands that made Cold War Hong Kong unique—a political need to legitimize the British colonial rule in the age of decolonization

and national independence, and a practical need to industrialize and commercialize Hong Kong to compensate for the loss of China trade. Rather than a highly hierarchical and racially restrictive society dominated by British firms and the bilingual compradors in the prewar period, Causeway Bay promised a new economy and a new lifestyle fitting the needs of professionals and the middle class. To explain this change, Tsui and Yu focus on the symbolism of two sites: the statue of Queen Victoria at the newly built Victorian Park, and Queen's College that was relocated from the Central District. On the two sites, there was no trace of the colonial grandiosity and imperial extravagance that marked the glory of the British Empire. Instead, both sites evoked pragmatism and prudence when the Cold War relegated the United Kingdom to playing second fiddle to the US on the global stage.

The same spirit of pragmatism and prudence is found in Anthony Li's essay about the urbanization of rural Hong Kong. In Hong Kong's history, the New Territories was an outlier because it was leased to Britain in 1898 for ninety-nine years. If Hong Kong was a frontier between Eastern culture and Western culture as well as between global trade and China trade, then the New Territories was the frontier within the frontier. Before the 1950s, the New Territories was full of farmlands managed by local families with genealogies dating back centuries. For many decades, it was adamantly rural and traditional vis-à-vis the Victorian splendor in the Central District. But the Cold War, especially the influx of refugees from mainland China in the early 1950s, changed the use of land in the New Territories. In his essay, Li gives an account of this incipient urbanization through the lens of one site: Luen Wo Market in Fanling. Ironically, despite its call for democracy and freedom, the Cold War helped to expand British colonial rule in Hong Kong. In the name of development and progress, the colonial government became a developmental state, converting farmland in the New Territories into market towns and industrial sites to justify the continuous rule of the British.

During the Cold War, Hong Kong was not only the frontier between the Eastern bloc and the Western bloc but also the hub of the overseas Chinese movie industry. In the article jointly authored by Po-Shek Fu, Qin Yameng, and Man-Fung Yip, we see how the Cold War heavily impacted the movie industry in Hong Kong. As the battleground to win hearts and minds, both the Chinese Communists and the KMT invested heavily in producing movies to lure audiences to their camps. But as these three authors point out, the cultural Cold War was never as simple as a battle between us versus them. As both competitors and colleagues in the small circle of the moviemaking industry, the two camps fought and helped one another. Those who worked

for the leftist or patriotic movie companies had an additional burden of following directives from the Beijing government, which asked them to simultaneously tell the Chinese story and to produce marketable movies. Obviously, the directive was difficult to follow due to the deep tension between being politically correct and being commercially successful. Nevertheless, the three authors see this struggle of leftist moviemakers as the beginning of the boom of Hong Kong movies in the 1960s and 1970s.

This section ends with Tze-ki Hon's essay on the expansion of Kai Tak Airport. As Janice Hyeju Jeong does in the Taipei section, Hon expands the scope of discussion of Cold War Hong Kong by linking the city to global networks beyond its borders. For people in Hong Kong, the Cold War was both a source of danger and a window to new opportunities. On one hand, the Cold War brought high tension with mainland China, the influx of refugees, and the loss of *entrepôt* trade with China. On the other hand, the Cold War forced the British government in London to act swiftly to revamp the damaged Kai Tak Airport, as the jet age was on the horizon. From the perspective of civil aviation, the Cold War was a blessing in disguise to people in Hong Kong. With an extended runway and a refurbished air terminal, Kai Tak Airport put Hong Kong on the global map of jet culture in the 1960s and 1970s. The irony of the Cold War is that while one door was closed (e.g., the free border crossing from Hong Kong to Shenzhen), another door was opened (e.g., the flight connections to Australia, Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States). To those who were adaptive and creative, crises offered opportunities and options, hopes, and expectations.

## Singapore

In section three, we move on to Singapore. Unlike Taipei and Hong Kong, Singapore was at a safe distance from the People's Republic of China (PRC)—a major source of tension in East and Southeast Asia after the outbreak of the Korean War. Located at the intersection between the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, Singapore sat at the crossroads of different ethnic and religious groups. At the same time, being a predominantly Chinese enclave on the Malay Peninsula, Singapore faced a much bigger challenge, namely the balance of power between China-centered East Asia, India-centered South Asia, the Muslim-centered transnational Islamic community, and the British-centered Commonwealth. Consequently, the battle for hearts and minds was more intense and conflictual, although it appeared calm and uncontroversial on the surface.

This section opens with Kevin Blackburn's essay. Blackburn chooses an unusual angle to discuss the complexity of Cold War Singapore. Using the term *deathscape*, he traces the complex process of moving or combining cemeteries to make room for urban redevelopment. On the surface, moving or combining cemeteries seems insignificant because it is a common practice in a fast-growing city where land is precious. But Blackburn has something deeper in mind. He sees the changing *deathscape* as a reflection of the changing memory of what Singapore is about. For him, the deaths and the tombs are reminders of bygone eras that might not fit the current political landscape. Furthermore, who should be remembered as war heroes and how they should be remembered are sensitive issues. They are at the heart of defining what Singapore stands for and who is counted as a member of the Singaporean community. In his account of the *deathscape*, Blackburn tells us that the cemeteries for the British and members of the Commonwealth are excluded, while the cemeteries of the locals are included in urban redevelopment. In tandem with political change, the *deathscape* in Singapore has moved from colonial to postcolonial.

As the *deathscape* in Singapore moved from colonial to postcolonial, so too the *moviescape* in Singapore moved from pre-national to national. In Soo Ei Yap's essay, movies are understood as vehicles for connecting communities, far or close. Echoing a theme developed in articles by Mei-Hsuan Chiang, Po-shek Fu, and others, the *moviescape* helps to create an imagined community based on sounds, sights, and stories from the silver screen. For Yap, the golden age of Chinese and Malay filmmaking during the 1950s and 1960s deserves our special attention. The movies made during that time were not only popular among viewers, but they inadvertently comprise the *moviescape* that helped create a common identity among Singaporeans based on the idea of multiculturalism. Certainly, the popularity of the movies lay in their entertainment value and artistic appeal. Yet, their openness to multiracial encounters and their aspiration for multicultural harmony spoke to an audience who wanted to identify themselves as Singaporean, not Chinese, Malay, or Indian. We may never know whether movies made multiculturalism the defining characteristic of Singapore, or if what was happening in politics and what was being shown on the silver screen just happened to coincide. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that the *moviescape* was part of the cultural milieu in which Singaporeans developed their national character.

If *deathscape* and *moviescape* show the imaginative images of space, Yan Bo's essay focuses on concrete spatial reorganization in the form of public housing. From the beginning, the nationalistic movement that

created Singapore was built on a struggle against two enemies—a struggle against Malayan nationalism/communism on one side and a struggle against conservatism/anticommunism on the other. The multinationalism that Soo Ei Yap discusses in her essay was one of the political tools deployed by the People's Action Party (PAP) to construct a national identity for the fledging Republic of Singapore. Cold War bipolarity conveniently helped the PAP to find a narrow path between Malayan nationalism/communism and conservatism/anti-communism. By being unwaveringly anti-communist, the PAP was able to consolidate its power within Singapore and receive support from the United States for economic development. In his essay, Yan Bo analyzes this narrow path by examining the political meanings of Singapore's public housing and homeownership scheme. On the surface, urban renewal in Singapore appeared to be what a good government should do. At a deeper level, Yan Bo argues, the public housing and homeownership schemes were intended to defeat the Maoist Barisan Sosialis at their own game. By doing what a socialist government would do, PAP proved that they were more Maoist than Barisan Sosialis in terms of developing the services of a paternalist state. But they were categorically different from Barisan Sosialis because they skillfully avoided ideological excess, proclivity for violence, and malicious social interruptions. In this example, urban renewal had a clear political implication. It was part of the governmentality of the state.

As Tze-ki Hon does for Hong Kong, Ying-kit Chan takes the story of an airport to chart the course of Singapore's development. For Chan, Changi Airport is indeed a landmark defining Singapore's position in the world. With flights constantly arriving from and departing for cities around the world, Changi Airport makes Singapore a global city. But for Chan, Changi Airport presents a case of "Indigenizing the Cold War." By that, he means that Changi airport—its design, its facilities, and its networks of flights—serves as a spatial signifier of the foreign policy of the PAP. On the other hand, Singapore was adamantly anticommunist dating back to the founding of the republic. This anticommunist stance gave the PAP the liberty to exercise its authoritarian power, particularly against its opponents. Somehow, the PAP found a way to balance the openness to the world with the pursuit of national security at all costs. Chan finds that Changi Airport exemplified beautifully this balance of the two competing claims. On one hand, Changi Airport was indisputably global, showing Singapore's willingness to serve as an oasis for all great powers and major economies. On the other, Changi Airport was run like a national trophy, intensively competing with its regional rival, Thailand's Don Mueang Airport. Chan sees a continuity

from Cold War Singapore to post-Cold War Singapore. In the two periods of time, the PAP pursued the same political agenda, namely nonalignment globally and authoritarian rule domestically. Seemingly contradictory, the two sides are complementary because they are parts of the developmental state in serving global capitalism.

### A Tale of Three Cities

Together, the thirteen chapters provide a picture of three vibrant cities that connected East Asia and Southeast Asia to the Cold War. Viewing the Cold War through the lens of cities, the three sections offer a unique perspective on how urban space serves as the site of inclusion and exclusion, delineation and negotiation, and transition and transgression in the global rivalry between the Free World and the Communist world. As such, this volume is as much about the different uses of urban space as it is about the transformations in domestic and global politics that gave rise to what we may call a (shared) Cold War memory. Our goal is not to answer all questions about the meanings of space in the three cities. Instead, our goal is to raise awareness to the fact that the reconfiguration and representation of urban space shapes people's minds, people's bodies, and people's expectations for the future. Through this tale of three cities, we provide glimpses of life that are not only rich and variegated but also uplifting and reinvigorating. This tale of three cities is a series of stories about real people who attempted to find hope in darkness and to summon courage to face challenges. At this moment, when the rhetoric of a new cold war portends the return of a divided world based on exclusion and competition, we need this tale to remind us that the world is intrinsically interconnected, because we need one another to make this world a better place.

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# Part I

Taipei



# 1. Building a Transnational Anticommunist Network: The Operation and Implications of the USIS Presence in Taipei

*Pei-yin Lin*

**Abstract:** The cityscape of Taipei is a fluid social space or cultural realm that certain residents, particularly the émigré elites, experienced on emotional, intellectual, and ideological levels, allowing them to connect with American culture. Focusing on the transnational, anticommunist bloc building of the United States Information Service (USIS), I explore the general America-longing mindset among Taiwanese youths, regardless of their attitudes toward nationalist rule, fostered by the USIS's apparatus throughout the 1960s and 1970s. This US-centric, anticommunist liberalism is manifested in two cases—the comparatively apolitical and literature-emphasized stance of the USIS-subsidized journal *Literary Review*, and the highly inclusive open-mindedness of the Iowa International Writing Program facilitated by the USIS director Richard McCarthy's personal network. I conclude that Taipei's cityscape continues to reveal signs of various cultural influences arising from different outside forces even now.

**Keywords:** Iowa International Writing Program, *Literary Review*, Richard McCarthy, Taipei, USIS

## Introduction

The late Taiwanese director Edward Yang's 1991 film *A Brighter Summer Day* takes its title from the American pop singer Elvis Presley's hit "Are You Lonesome Tonight?" While the line aptly summarizes the protagonist Xiaosi's affection for the heroine Xiaoming, it also reveals the cultural impact of the

United States in forging the collective memory of youths growing up in the 1960s under Chiang Kai-shek's authoritarian rule, one of whom was Yang. In the film, Xiaosi's friend Xiao Maowang (Little Elvis) aspires to imitate Elvis Presley's singing. He even sends a demo tape to Presley, who responds that he is pleased, albeit surprised, to learn that his music is so popular "on a unknown, tiny island" (Yang 1991, 3:52:39). However, the tape Little Elvis hopes to pass on to Xiaosi in prison is callously thrown away by the warden, a symbol of the Nationalist Party's (the Kuomintang, or KMT) top-down authoritarianism. While this act can be read as a "conscious self-mockery, a metanarrative of Taiwan's neocolonial appropriation of American music" (Yeh 2003, 5), in this essay I am more concerned with the vision of American culture as signifying freedom and the KMT's anticommunist geopolitical policy in which the United States has played a vital role.

With the KMT's retreat to Taipei in 1949, the ideological confrontation between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait became pivotal in the context of the greater Cold War, particularly with the United States actively involved in building an anticommunist network in East Asia to contain the Soviet threat and constrain the expansion of communism through its calculated "powerplay" on the continent (Cha 2009/2010). The aid granted by the United States to Taiwan from 1950 to 1965 was fairly comprehensive, funding not only improvements to Taiwan's infrastructure such as transportation, but also a variety of education and publication projects. For the latter, the United States Information Services (USIS), directed by the late Richard McCarthy, served as one of the foremost agencies working to establish America's global anticommunist network. Taiwan's USIS is one of seventy-six branches across the world. McCarthy acknowledged that while he was in charge of the USIS in Taiwan its most notable activity was "the work that we did with young writers and artists" (McCarthy 1988).

While the relationship between the USIA (United States Information Agency) and America's Cold War-era public diplomacy has inspired book-length studies by Nicholas J. Cull (2008; 2012), research on the USIA's subsidiary USIS remains sparse. The exception is research focusing on the *World Today* press, an internal unit aiming to promote American culture with translation in postwar Asia under the charge of the USIA in Hong Kong (Shan 2007). As far as the USIS in Taipei is concerned, existing findings have touched upon the role of the USIS in shaping Taiwan's postwar modernist aesthetics (Chen 2012) and facilitating the export of Taiwanese literature (Wang 2014a). In other words, scholarly attention to date tends to focus on the operation and impact of the US-influenced literary structure to the extent that the other important dimension of Taiwan's Cold War culture—the

general yearning-for-the-US mentality—remains understudied. Inspired by the framework of cities as symbols put forward by the urban anthropologist Peter J. M. Nas (2011), I explore how Taiwan served as a site for the US-involved transnational anticommunist cultural bloc, with a focus on the USIS in Taipei, formerly located on the spot currently occupied by the National 228 Memorial Museum.

Based on multi-sourced research, I investigate the apparatus of the USIS in Taipei in general and also examine the well-known director Richard McCarthy's personal network, particularly during his four-year service from 1958 to 1962. Space in this essay is explored as both an ideologically infused realm for literary production and a psychological one for individuals living in Taipei, which was permeated by a distinct US-leaning atmosphere at that time. It begins with a review of the building in which the USIS was once located to map out the interrelationship between spatial use and Taiwan's sociopolitical history. It then describes how the USIS in Taipei helped develop an America-longing mindset among the Taiwanese people, especially young intellectuals. That discussion is followed by two case studies on the Taipei USIS's operations, mainly regarding how it covertly advocated its anticommunist ideology in Taiwan by sponsoring certain publications and launching various cultural projects. The first example—*Literary Review* founded by Tsi-an Hsia—represents the former, whereas the second example—McCarthy's inter-Asian and transpacific social network, particularly his circle of literary friends and his role in recommending talented authors to the International Writing Program (IWP) at the University of Iowa—illustrates the latter. Finally, the implications of America's Cold War cultural diplomacy in early postwar Taiwan are appraised.

### **The USIS on a Site of Palimpsestic History**

It is common knowledge that the Cold War was fought not only militarily but also through a series of hot cultural wars, or soft power, competitions involving public diplomacy; for America, the goal was to promote American culture and win the support of foreign intellectuals. To achieve the first objective, the USIS was established in Taipei as early as 1945 at the intersection of Nanhai Road and Chuanzhou Street on the site of the former Taiwan Education Association. It was designed by Ide Kaoru (1879–1944), chief architect of the Government-General's Office in Taiwan, in a similar style as the Taipei Public Hall (present-day Zhongshan Hall), and completed in 1936. The idea of building a modern exhibition hall for various cultural,

artistic, and educational activities was first put forward by the Taiwanese Government-General at the coronation of Emperor Shōwa in late 1928. Throughout the 1930s, it was a major venue for routine art exhibitions, including the Taiwan art exhibitions (*Taiden*, 1927–36), the subsequent Taiwanese Government-General's art exhibitions (*fuden*, 1938–43), and the exhibitions of the Taiyang Art Association (Taiyō bijutsu kyōkai), the largest non-governmental art organization in Taiwan since May 1935.

Although there was no neighboring police headquarters to “[perform] the colonial state function of monitoring and repression” (Hsia 2002, 13), the Taiwan Education Association was still part of the colonial modernity scheme and contrasted with more down-to-earth public spaces such as the boisterous streets of Dadaocheng. With its main role to host the Taiwan art exhibitions and other exhibitions (Lai 2018), the Taiwan Education Association provided a “consecration” space, in Bourdieu's words, with young Taiwanese painters striving to have their works selected, exhibited, and assessed in public there. The Taiyang Art Association was established in November 1934 to provide additional opportunities for artists to exhibit their work. Ide Kaoru was not merely involved in exhibition preparations, such as selecting judges, for both *Taiden* and *fuden*. He actually took part in the opening ceremony of the Taiyang Art Association, delivering a speech to encourage unity among young Taiwanese painters (Taiwan nichu nichu shimpō 1934). Ide's presence at the Taiyang Art Association's opening ceremony can be understood as a consequence of his apposite art background (he himself was a painter). It was also indicative of the intricate relationship between local Taiwanese artists and Japanese officials at that time, as Ide's attendance served as a symbolic official endorsement improving Taiwanese painters' chances of having their work shown in public exhibitions.

If the modern, three-story Taiwan Education Association provided a site where the colonial government's educational goals intersected with local artists' dedication to art and exploring Taiwanese culture, it also became a venue where the KMT's anticommunism encountered American culture in the postwar years. After Japan's surrender in 1945, the building was used temporarily by the KMT's navy before it became the Taiwan Provincial Senate. Following the Senate's relocation to Taizhong, the US embassy began to rent the venue for its information service in Taiwan in 1958. Inside, the multipurpose Abraham Lincoln American Cultural Center was established to promote art and culture. The venue was reserved for the USIS's internal use until January 1972 when the space was opened to the public through application. Notable cultural events included the choreographer Lin Hwai-min's dance demonstration and public lectures

given in February 1973 (“Lin Huaimin yanshi xiandaiwu” 1973), Hung Tong’s individual art exhibition, and Xi Dejin’s exhibition in 1978.<sup>1</sup> Demonstrating the location’s significance, the self-taught painter Hung’s exhibition attracted more than fifty thousand people on its first day. With people forming long queues to enter the American Cultural Center, Hung was forced to sneak back to his hotel to avoid the crowd. The USIS’s importance as a popular site for Taiwanese people to acquire the latest cultural information is clear (“Hung Tung huazhan jiemu” 1976).

The USIS in Taipei served as a model for other similarly purposed offices in Taiwan. Later on, five more offices were established in Taizhong, Tainan, Jiayi, Pingdong, and Gaoxiong. They shared the same primary goal—to disseminate American thought and culture to the Republic of China (Taiwan). The USIS’s cultural division launched a series of translation projects and administered several cultural exchange programs, among them the Fulbright Program. Owing to the KMT’s censorship, information about foreign cultures was relatively limited in early postwar Taiwan; the USIS library, quite naturally, became a popular cultural site frequented by Taiwanese youths for various purposes, such as accessing open-shelf English publications, watching films, attending concerts or art exhibitions, or simply accessing information about studying in America. Following the United States establishing diplomatic ties with the People’s Republic of China, the USIS was renamed the American Cultural Center in 1979. In 1993, the Legislative Yuan that ruled the building was a class three historical landmark. It continued to house the American Institute in Taiwan’s culture and information section until 2006, when plans to convert it into the National 228 Memorial Museum were in preparation. On 28 February 2011, the Memorial Museum officially went into operation.

### **The USIS in America-Leaning Taiwan as a Hub of Psychological Warfare**

The impact of the United States in early postwar Taiwan is multifaceted. Economically, Taiwan received approximately USD 100 million per year from the United States from 1951 to 1965 (Su 2019, 26). Militarily, US forces were present in Taiwan from August 1950 to 1979, with numbers peaking at 30,000 in the

1 Hung Tong (1920–87), known for his vividly colored folk style, was a pioneering painter in the Taiwanese nativist art movement, whereas the late Xi Dejin (1923–81) was a prominent émigré modernist artist.

late 1960s. Taiwan was under the protection of the Sino-American Mutual Defense Treaty signed in late 1954. Culturally, America served as an object of desire among young people to the extent that it replaced Japan's (colonial) modernity and functioned as "the model of consumerist modernity" for Taiwan, as well as for Japan and South Korea (Yoshimi and Buist 2003, 445). Taiwanese society was largely pro-US, although this enthusiasm ebbed during several notable historical moments. Among them was the May 24 (Liu Ziran) incident in which Taiwanese people protested in front of the American Embassy over the American Army Master Sergeant Robert Reynolds's killing of the Chinese officer Liu Ziran and his subsequent acquittal.

In the 1950s, Karl L. Rankin, then the US ambassador in Taiwan, stated that the value of Taiwan lay in the fact that Taiwan could serve as a vehicle for executing American policy in the Far East (Chang 1998, 201). Following China's involvement in the Korean War, Rankin further advocated the idea of Taiwan, the Free China, as a rallying point for all freedom-loving Chinese people. More specifically, he suggested that Washington DC should encourage Chiang Kai-shek to establish Taiwan as a showcase of democracy in the hopes of winning the hearts of the People's Republic of China's (PRC) people (Chang 1998, 206–7). Rankin's attention to psychological warfare helps explain America's public and cultural diplomacy efforts in Taiwan, in addition to the more concrete contributions of economic assistance and military co-defense. Taiwan was considered Free China largely due to its US-leaning culture. When martial law was imposed, young Taiwanese listened to American music, such as songs by Elvis Presley or Don McLean, broadcast by the AFNT (American Forces Network Taiwan) to promote freedom in sync with the American military and foreign diplomats in Taiwan. Beginning in 1952, general readers in urban areas could also access the Chinese version of *Reader's Digest*, which remained true until its US headquarters established its regional branch and began publishing its official Chinese version in 1965. In addition, the cultural elites could benefit from the prestigious visiting and training programs orchestrated by the US government in the hopes of "cultivat[ing] a favorable impression of America" (Chao 2011, 113).

Under these circumstances, an American-leaning social climate came to prevail in Taiwan throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Between 1962 and 1972, among the 16,542 people who studied abroad without taking exams, 14,023, or 84.8 percent, chose to go to the United States (Nanfang 1991, 218–19). In the literary field, those years witnessed the blossoming of overseas (*liuxuesheng*) literature, exemplified by Yu Lihua's 1967 *Again the Palm Trees* and Bai Xianyong's earlier "New Yorker" series of stories, which explores the images—such as freedom and openness—with which

American culture is often associated. Although this general dependence on the US and the America-worshipping attitude of the 1970s became targets of criticism in the works of nativist writers such as Huang Chunming and Chen Yingzhen, America's image as a symbol of liberation persisted. Zhu Tianxin, for instance, in her *Jirang ge* (Songs of rustic pleasures), a series of essays recalling her youth in the 1970s, details how the KMT-imposed "counter-attack on the Mainland" (Zhu 1989, 26) ideal aligned with the General MacArthur-inspired teenager's fondness for American pop songs and the Americanized street Zhongshan North Road, dubbed the street for "slaves of foreigners" (*yangnu*) (Zhu 1989, 53) and typically crowded with foreigner-worshipping (and largely American-worshipping) locals.

However, among young intellectuals not everyone conformed to the KMT's ideology. Zheng Hongsheng, born in Taiwan and Zhu's contemporary, recalls being inspired by Lu Xun's works and Chen Yingzhen's socialist ideas while listening to the all-English broadcast of the AFNT, enjoying the protest songs by Joan Baez and Bob Dylan, and reading Charles Reich's countercultural classic *The Greening of America* (2007, 86–89). Despite their diverse political inclinations, the youth growing up in the early postwar period were commonly immersed in American cultural products. With American influences being integrated into the daily lives of people in Taiwan, it is perhaps not surprising that Taiwanese residents wrote more than two hundred thousand letters to President Carter demanding that America not abandon Taiwan (Roy 2003, 98–151) in 1979, a drastic interruption of Taiwan's postwar Americanism.

The USIS can be considered the foremost site facilitating Americanism. Its significance as an artistic mediating and trendsetting operation is confirmed in various cultural figures' recollections. Art critic He Zhengguang noted that, although only reproductions were exhibited, the USIS's exhibitions were "a rarity," and still offered people in Taiwan some "concrete impressions about America's twentieth-century art ... we very much hope to see the originals ... the artistic exchange is quite profound" (1963, 38). Writer Yin Di [Ke Qinghua] (2000), when recalling the 1960s, stated that those who visited the USIS at 54 Nanhai Road to read English books were then considered highly fashionable. *America Today*, since renamed *World Today* (1952–80), was read by everyone.<sup>2</sup> It was a foreign-culture-worshipping (*chongyang*) era.

2 According to the USIS-HK former employee Charles Cross, *World Today* was published by the USIS in Hong Kong, with the hope to "attract readers in Taiwan and Southeast Asia" together with another USIS-HK publication, *Four Seas Pictorial* (1951–1954), although the latter was short-lived (Cross, 1999, 102).

If someone had recently traveled to the US, his or her social cache would increase dramatically. Travelogues were also enormously popular. Zhong Meiyin's travelogues enjoyed impressive sales, comparable to the Far East English dictionary compiled by Liang Shiqiu (Yin Di 2000, 156–57). Fu Yuean commented that the USIS in those years was like a cultural salon in Taipei. The university students often joked “Come, come, come! Come to [National] Taiwan University. Go, go, go. Go to the United States” (*lai lai lai, lai Taida, qu qu qu, qu Meiguo*), often adding “read *World Today*” (*kankankan, kan Jinri shijie*) (2003, 149–50). While studying in America was a shared goal among both émigré and Taiwanese youths, it was possibly more common among the émigré youths due to their difficulty identifying with Taiwan. Zhu Tianxin, for example, writes that those second-generation mainlander youths all “thought of leaving this place [Taiwan],” unlike the Taiwanese boys whose “steadfastness” was puzzling (2003, 247).

### The USIS-Subsidized Channel of Anticommunist Liberalism

One of the USIS's earliest achievements in Taiwan was its sponsorship of the magazine *Literary Review* (*wenxue zazhi*), founded in September 1956 and edited by T. A. Hsia before he left for the United States in 1959. Forty-eight issues were published in total, and the circulation was relatively small (about 4,500 copies). According to Wang Meixiang (2014b, 78–82), the USIS played an active role from the beginning. McCarthy reported in 1961 that *Literary Review*, as a “USIS Taipei unattributed Chinese monthly publication,” was launched under the “discontinued services” category by a local publisher at the USIS's suggestion to position Free China (Taiwan) as the center for Chinese-language creative writing. The USIS purchased 2,000 copies per issue to distribute to nine other USIS posts.<sup>3</sup> Prior to McCarthy's report, John A. Bottorff told the USIA that the USIS in Taipei conducted a survey evaluating *Literary Review* in September 1959, two months after T. A. Hsia, sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation, left for the United States.

In Taiwan's literary historiography, *Literary Review* has often been viewed as a pioneering voice in Taiwanese modernism, particularly its most

3 The USIS-sponsored *Modern Literature* was similar. According to Chen Ruoxi (2011, 96), the USIS agreed to purchase 1,000 copies of each issue of *Modern Literature*, which amounts to 50 percent of the 2,000 copies published. In the same book, Chen also mentions that McCarthy invited Eileen Chang to attend a dinner with Wu Luqin and other modern literature writers when Chang visited Taipei in 1961 (106). However, Bai Xianyong (2012) denies the financial support from the USIS, stating that McCarthy only agreed to buy 600 copies of issues 10 and 11.

US-centric iterations (Chen 2011, 318), standing in contrast to modernist poets' earlier embrace of French modernism, such as Chi Xian's explicit veneration of Baudelaire. However, evaluating the periodical in light of McCarthy's revelation, the anticommunist motives behind the USIS's patronage should not be downplayed. In this regard, Zhu Shuangyi's comparison of *Literary Review* with *Free China* (2000, 95), a KMT-sponsored periodical launched in 1949, is valuable, as it enables us to consider the former as an anticommunist literary practice and the latter as that of political anticommunist liberalism. Indeed, Nie Hualing, who is in charge of the literary supplement of *Free China*, recalls that a small circle of her literary friends, who were contributors to *Free China*, used to gather at scholar-cum-bookstore owner Liu Shouyi's home on Tong'an Street in southern Taipei. As Liu, together with the two National Taiwan University teachers, T. A. Hsia and Wu Luqin, were all involved in *Literary Review*, this group of writers surrounding *Free China* consequently became *Literary Review's* contributors (Nie 1990, 31–32). Liu, Hsia, and Wu all came to Taiwan after 1949. Their cultural capital as professors or publishers, plus Wu's job at the USIS and his convincing McCarthy to sponsor *Literary Review* (Yu 1983) produced a US-leaning space. Within a less than ten-minute walk, one could also find the former site of the KMT-orchestrated anticommunist Chinese Literature and Arts Association, as well as the locations of several publishers and homes of renowned modernist writers such as Wang Wenxing and Yu Guangzong. Thus, the USIS-sponsored *Literary Review* and the KMT-sponsored *Free China*, as well as modernist cultural figures, overlap, fostering a conceived anticommunist space in southern Taipei, encompassing Tong'an Street, as well as the nearby Wenzhou Street where Hsia's dormitory was, Amoy Street where Yu Guangzhong lived, and Roosevelt Road where National Taiwan University is located. It was an important lived cultural and literary space, particularly for émigré authors in Taipei during the postwar period.

However, in late 1950s Taipei, there were notable idiosyncrasies within this group of émigré writers. This is exemplified in the difference between T. A. Hsia and his more politically engaged contemporaries, such as Lei Zhen. Hsia urged writers both in and outside of Taiwan to submit their creative writing and translations to the journal. He further explicated that the journal welcomed critical essays on literary theory as well as on Chinese and foreign literature that could stimulate research interest, emphasizing that it was important for literature to tell the truth and employ a style that is guileless, rational, and calm (1956). Although Hsia, in the same article, claims that *Literary Review* aims to inherit and carry forward the great tradition of Chinese literature, Hsia himself was quite familiar with Leavis's

great tradition, and he, like his brother C. T. Hsia, was fond of using new criticism when evaluating literary works. He emphasized writers' autonomy, similar to his brother's less sympathetic attitude toward the politically engaged leftist authors in his 1962/1963 debate with Prusek in *T'ung pao*. Nevertheless, in light of the remuneration, T. A. Hsia translated into Chinese three novels about the Communist Party's operations in Europe and life under the scrutiny of NKVD (the Soviet secret police agency), *The Burned Bramble*, *The Abyss* by Manes Sperber, and *A Room on the Route* by Geoffrey Blunden. This work was commissioned by the CIA-backed Asia Foundation in Hong Kong (Tee 2001, 221).

However, T. A. Hsia had personal reservations about his contemporary intellectuals' overt political involvement. He was not impressed by the behavior of Lei Zhen. In his 1958 letter to C. T. Hsia, T. A. Hsia referred to Lei as "a person with political ambitions," and Lei's inviting him to contribute to *Free China* was perceived as "Lei's typical dubious sincerity" (Hsia 1958, 279). Moreover, he teased Lei (also Yin Haiguang), who naïvely admired Rousseau and embraced liberalism. In his eyes, Lei and Yin represented the "shallowness" of Taiwanese culture, but added that Taiwan's culture would be even more boring without the periodical *Free China* (Hsia 1958, 279). In the same letter, T. A. Hsia also expressed his doubts about the sustainability of the USIS's patronage. Therefore, it can be deduced that T. A. Hsia was conscious that the objective of *Literary Review* was to promote creative writing in simple and unadorned (*pingshi*) language, and it was clear that it aimed to follow the tradition of the eponymous periodical founded by Liu Shouyi's former teacher Zhu Guangqian before the second Sino-Japanese War (Wu 1977). Despite T. A. Hsia's emphasis on literary merit, he was not inattentive to politics. On the contrary, he acknowledged his profound interest in political affairs. Yet, he was too cautious to be convinced to join any party. In fact, he told himself that getting involved in politics would likely lead him to "attend to one thing and lose sight of another," (Hsia 1959, 94) with reference to Lu Xun's failed political engagement.

Apart from reminding himself not to get involved in politics or written polemics, T. A. Hsia, while conducting research in America, also seconded his brother's advice to "[reduce] discussions about the Chinese Communist Party and conduct more research on ancient China. We [Chinese] will ultimately have our influence," and "there is no need to have pointless quarrels among American people" (1961, 450–51). This again indicates that T. A. Hsia avoided revealing his political stances. While this can be seen as a result of a double institutionalization consisting of the KMT's authoritarianism and America-dominated knowledge production on China in the Cold War

context and his need to earn a living, I view Hsia's caution about politics as symbiotic with the politics of the Cold War era. In other words, while being subject to the sociopolitical context, Hsia still strove to exert his agency through his editorial role and research in the United States. In this regard, the journal *Literary Review*, while associated with the US's public diplomacy and benefiting from an American subsidy, can still be seen as a cultural space allowing Hsia and his editorial peers to exert their limited power and promote their preferred "honest" literature and other literary notions. The critical essays on either Chinese or Western literature, which appeared regularly at the beginning of each issue of *Literary Review*, for example, are illustrative of T. A. Hsia's emphasis on in-depth literary criticism.

### **McCarthy's Social Network as an Extension of Taipei's Anticommunist Space**

As mentioned, winning the hearts of foreign intellectuals was an important goal of America's public diplomacy efforts. In addition to subsidizing anti-communist publications, the US government bolstered organizations such as the IWP at the University of Iowa, which received funding from the CIA. McCarthy had recommended Chen Ruoxi, Nie Hualing, Bai Xianyong, Wang Wenxing, and Ouyang Zi for scholarships. With the exception of Chen, all entered the writers' workshop at the University of Iowa, McCarthy's alma mater.

According to a 2015 book by Eric Bennett, a participant at the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop (IWW) from 1998 to 2000, the American local writers-targeted workshop founded by Wilbur Schramm in 1935 should not be confused with the IWP established by Paul Engle and Nie Hualing in 1967, which aims to invite non-American writers to Iowa for residential programs, although Engle served as the second IWW director after Schramm from 1941 to 1966. Bennett describes the rise of creative writing at the university level as a result of America's Cold War mentality in which self-expression, instead of the collectivism typically associated with communism, is praised. The book's inclusion of Engle's biography offers insight into the relationship between the role of creative writing and Taiwanese-American politics.

McCarthy's network played a crucial role in connecting young writers in Taiwan with the outside world. He facilitated Eileen Chang's brief trip from Hong Kong to Taiwan in 1961. Before Chang's trip, McCarthy and Chang already knew each other. Chang was recruited by McCarthy to serve in the USIS in Hong Kong from 1952 to 1955 during McCarthy's assignment as an

information officer for six years (1950–56). Chang, commissioned by the USIS, wrote two anticommunist novels (*Rice-Sprout Song* and *Naked Earth*) during this period, and McCarthy handled Chang's translation work for the publisher of *World Today*. Upon arriving in Taipei, Chang stayed with McCarthy at his residence on Yangming Mountain. McCarthy hosted a dinner for Chang to meet the translator Nancy Ing, together with a few young writers involved with *Modern Literature* (Bai Xianyong, Wang Wenxing, Chen Ruoxi, Ouyang Zi, and Wang Zhenhe). Prior to the meeting, Chang had read Wang Zhenhe's story "Ghost, Northwind, Man," and expressed to McCarthy her interest in Hualian, the setting of Wang's story. McCarthy informed Wang of this, which led to Wang's accompanying Chang to visit Hualian (Qiu 2015). In his own account, McCarthy (1988) remarked on his role in propelling anticommunism. He regarded his one and a half years in Bangkok as a public affairs officer, between his posts in Hong Kong and Taiwan, as an assignment to a "psychological indoctrination program" (1988, unpaginated) operated jointly by the Thai government and American agencies. It was cut back because the Thais were already anticommunist and therefore did not require the U.S. to invest significant amounts of money or effort.

Bearing this public diplomacy agenda in mind, McCarthy's activities in Taiwan can be better understood. In 1961, similar to his role in Hong Kong, McCarthy selected works by Wang Zhenhe, Wang Wenxing, and Ouyang Zi for *New Voices: Stories and Poems by Young Chinese Writers*, edited and translated by Nancy Chang Ing. The publisher Heritage Press was subsidized by the USIS. Although McCarthy's network did not necessarily guarantee a promising literary career for Chang or those young Taiwanese writers surrounding *Modern Literature*, it increased Chang's connections to a literary agent such as Marie Rodell and the Pulitzer Prize winner John P. Marquand. Impressed by Chang's *Rice-Sprout Song*, Marquand brought back the first two chapters to the United States to "help recommend it to be published" (Gao 2011, 253–54). And thanks to McCarthy's role as a cultural broker, he helped "identify some very capable people," and "a great many of them went to the United States to study writing" (McCarthy 1998, unpaginated). The timing overlapped with Engle's eagerness to recruit young intellectuals to study at the University of Iowa, in light of the Soviet Union's setting up a university in Moscow to attract young talent from around the world. Engle's appeal was supported by the Rockefeller Foundation, then an outer-ring organization of the CIA, which granted Engle USD 10,000 to travel to Asia and Europe to recruit young writers, particularly left-leaning intellectuals, to travel to the United States (Lin 2016, 228). The young Taiwanese talents

that benefited from McCarthy's recommendation and Engle's zeal to recruit new students included Bai Xianyong, Wang Wenxing, Ouyang Zi, and Nie Hualing, the latter whom Engle met in 1963 during his recruitment trip to Taipei and fell in love with. Prior to this, Nie was already connected with McCarthy's network through her translation work and creative writing published by the Heritage Press founded by McCarthy.

The encounter between Engle and Nie left a legacy in modern Taiwanese culture and literature, although Nie in her autobiography considers her Taiwan sojourn a low point in her life due to the deaths of her mother and younger brother, her strained marriage, and the imprisonment of her *Free China* boss Lei Zhen, which resulted in her and Yin Haiguang, a dear friend of Nie's mother, living under the KMT's surveillance. When Engle urged her to go to Iowa soon after their 1963 meeting, Nie was hesitant, assuming that her application would not be approved. But she managed to travel there as a visiting writer for the IWW hosted by Engle at Iowa in 1964, and Nie raised funds beginning in 1967 to set up the International Writing Workshop for non-American authors with Engle, extending the IWW's initiative. Several writers in Taiwan (such as Chen Yingzhen, Wang Zhenhe, Bo Yang, Yang Kui, Lin Huaimin, Li Ang, and Wang Tuo) and China (such as Ding Ling, Mo Yan, Su Tong, Yu Hua, and Ah Cheng) were invited to attend it. The funding for the IWP came from different sources, including the Farfield Foundation (a CIA front for supporting cultural operations), Asia Foundation, and other nongovernmental organizations. In addition to hospitality, Nie and Engle welcomed writers with different viewpoints to gather for debates. Nie, in particular, aspired to offer dissident authors a freer space for writing and speech (Wu 2011, 30). One anecdote from the IWP describes an Israeli writer and Palestine writer becoming friends after initially berating one another (Lin 2016, 229–30).

While writers were invited to discuss literature, Nie and Engle were still sensitive about world politics. As early as 1968, they sent out invitations to two dissidents—Chen Yingzhen and Václav Havel. As anticipated, both were unable to make it due to political reasons—Chen was imprisoned for his left-leaning ideology while Havel went into hiding after the Russian army entered Prague and began suppressing the mass protest known as the Prague Spring. Nie and Engle endeavored to aid Chen, such as by reporting the news in the United States to put pressure on the KMT government. In 1974, Nie translated some of Mao Zedong's poems and was put on the KMT's black list herself. Other invitees, such as Bo Yang and Yang Kui, were both incarcerated by the KMT government for satirizing Chiang Kai-shek in a comic strip he translated into Chinese and for

penning the KMT-critical “A Declaration of Peace” respectively. This suggested Nie’s “problematic” stance toward the (anticommunist) KMT regime, demonstrating how a social space in southern Taiwan, doubly influenced by both the US and KMT, was transformed into a site harboring dissent toward the KMT in the US. Ironically, the Chinese government deemed the IWP anticommunist. Owing to the IWP’s liberal attitude and humanistic idealism in making invitations, it was positively appraised by several attendees. Wang Anyi, for example, when accompanying her mother Ru Zhijuan to IWP in 1983, commented that she truly appreciated the opportunity it offered, as it enabled her to meet with writers from Taiwan whom she otherwise could not have met until the KMT government lifted the travel ban to China. Xiang Yang also commented that he appreciated the opportunity for people of different political stances to meet. It was through his participation in the IWP in 1985 that he met the dissident and blacklisted composer Xiao Tairan (Li 2020, 73). He further commented on the unforgettable evening discussions he had with other writers “of different political stances” and that the program “has enabled Sinophone writers to have a dependable home in the United States” (Xiang 2009, 69–73). It can be concluded that, despite its partial governmental funding, the IWP ultimately grew into something beyond the constraint of political ideology and created many affectionate memories based on personal friendship.

## Conclusion

In this essay, early postwar Taipei is positioned as a site shaped by the double-layered anticommunism propelled by the ruling KMT and its situational ally, the United States. The former benefited from the latter’s economic and military support, whereas the latter identified Taiwan as a valuable vantage point for its anticommunist containment efforts in the Far East. Through the USIS, which was in charge of cultural operations, the US-centered anticommunist network was established through various US-subsidized translation projects, exchange programs, or selected exhibitions in which America continued to exert its unattributed cultural power. It teased out the multi-layered colonial history of Taiwan born by the USIS in Taipei. Inherited from the Japanese-era Taiwan Education Association designed by Ide Kaoru in 1931, it witnessed Taiwan’s multiple colonial powers as well as a specific dimension of postwar Taiwan’s cultural tendency to shift away from Americanism and toward gradual indigenization. In terms

of physical space, the most vibrant cultural hub, the Dadaocheng area in western Taipei during the colonial era, has now gradually shifted toward southern Taipei near the Zhongzheng District and to a lesser extent the Da'an District. To some extent, this fact signals that discussions about decolonization in Taiwan must consider in parallel the Japanese colonial legacy and America's cultural imperialism in the early postwar years, although Taiwan itself may now be a neocolonial power in relation to some of its neighboring countries.

With Taiwan's varied colonial past in mind, I then zoomed in on the operations of the USIS in Taipei as well as the USIS leader Richard McCarthy's social network to demonstrate that Taipei at that time served as a hub of American public diplomacy and psychological warfare. In the two cases of the United States' public diplomacy—the journal *Literary Review* and the Iowa-based IWP—individual key players exhibited different attitudes toward politics. T. A. Hsia's purposeful distance and Nie and Engle's more engaged humanism offer two possibilities for intellectuals seeking to transcend the dogmatic Cold War polemics. While it is difficult to quantify the efficacy of the USIS's cultural operations, America in the 1960s and 1970s, through its various projects and activities, established a multifaceted network to propel its anticommunist ideology on the local, inter-Asian, and transpacific levels within Taiwan and beyond.

In Henri Lefebvre's spatial triad, Taipei as a conceived space was shaped by modernist literary figures, primarily émigrés, during the early postwar era. It was characterized by its KMT-associated anticommunist nature. This feature extended to the US through the migration of these writers and scholars, and became KMT critical. In the 2021 Meet Taipei, a curated city design event, Tong'an Street was designed with a focus on modernist literature. The Kishu An Forest of Literature, once the residence of the late modernist writer and professor Wang Wenxing, was renovated as a literary and leisure space. Taipei, with its prestigious status in Taiwan, retains its cultural, political, and educational significance in the Zhongzheng and Da'an Districts, where these émigré figures congregated. This stands in contrast to the modern Xinyi District and the more localized Datong or Wanhua Districts. However, the USIS building in the Zhongzheng District, once a symbol of American culture, has now faded from its former glory. All in all, Taipei is a city whose landscape continues to evince signs of its multi-sourced cultural and attitudinal influences brought by various (imperialist) external forces. If Little Presley epitomizes a colonial mimicry of America in *A Brighter Summer Day*, then the current function of the former USIS office signifies that the substance of Taiwan's cultural

subjectivity hinges largely on its “2.28” historical trauma,<sup>4</sup> as the location was converted into Taiwan’s National 228 Memorial Museum in 2007, aiming to advocate for freedom, democracy, and human rights. Consequently, Taipei has witnessed a postwar transition from an anticommunist hub to a capital of Indigenization. However, it remains uncertain whether the Museum has effectively evolved into a frequently visited and vibrant space serving this purpose, as it requires time to be fully recognized and appreciated.

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4 The 2.28 Incident is an anti-KMT’s uprising that occurred on February 28, 1947. It was triggered when an agent from the Tobacco Monopoly Bureau accidentally killed a Taiwanese man while investigating illegal cigarette sales. The uprising was quickly suppressed by KMT troops, which led to the imposition of Martial Law and the subsequent White Terror period. In the 1990s, the KMT government officially issued an apology. This event is now widely regarded as pivotal in shaping Taiwanese identity.

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## 2. The Cityscape and Mindscape in Pai Hsien-yung's *Taipei People*

*Hsiao-Hui Chang*

**Abstract:** Pai Hsien-yung's *Taipei People* presents the developing cityscape of Taipei as well as the mindscapes of the citizens who lived and worked there in the 1950s and 1960s. Many sites embody the Sino-American relations and the Westernization of Taipei during the Cold War. For example, the reconstruction of the military dependents' villages reveals that the Nationalist government could not practice the return-to-the-mainland military plan without Washington's approval. In this essay, I will compare the landscapes in Pai's works with the exact locations in Taipei and explicate the characters' mindscapes according to their identities, memories, lifestyles, and careers. Pai's modernist literary technique is not only useful for portraying people's inner world but is also a product of American cultural diplomacy. Finally, I will explain the influence of the Cold War on the growth of Taipei, particularly its urban life and its literary production.

**Keywords:** Cold War, cityscape, Sino-American relations, modernist Chinese literature, Pai Hsien-yung, *Taipei People*

### Introduction

Taiwan, between the Pacific Ocean and the Taiwan Strait, was the divide between the Free World and the Communist world during the Cold War. The United States protected and supported Taiwan because of its strategic importance since the Korean War (Tucker 1994, 8). The diplomatic relations between Washington and Taipei have been recorded and analyzed by political scholars and experts on the Cold War. However, what about the Taiwanese people's experiences and feelings during the Cold War?

How did the Kuomintang servicemen who had retreated from mainland China react to the fact that it was hopeless to recover China? How could a widow of a soldier earn a living independently in a city she had never been to? What were the Taiwanese scholars' and students' views on American academics? How did homosexuals live in the days when homosexuality was taboo in Taiwan? To answer these questions, literature may provide more comprehensive answers.

As a novelist in Taipei, Pai Hsien-yung (1937–)<sup>1</sup> wrote fourteen stories about its residents and published them in a literary journal from 1965 to 1971. The stories were republished as a book in 1971 under the title *Taipei People* (Taibei ren) and an English translation of the book appeared in 1982. In these stories, Pai not only depicts the cityscape of Taipei but also vividly portrays Taipei residents' lives in the 1950s and 1960s. At the beginning of each of the stories, Pai often points out a clear site where the story was going to unfold. The urban landscape identified in the story could reveal the characters' social positions, economic conditions, lifestyles, and so on. In these stories, Pai focuses primarily on servicemen, ranging from retired soldiers to high-ranking generals, and their families. Pai was familiar with servicemen's experiences because his father, Pai Chung-hsi (1893–1966), was the general of the army (Ceng 2001, 197; Pai 2012, 7). Besides the military, he also showed tremendous interest in the experiences of people in university faculty quarters, high-class residences, ballrooms, wine houses, Songshan Airport, Academia Sinica, and Taipei New Park. These various locations formed the backdrop that made *Taipei People* a remarkable collection of stories about the experiences of Taipei residents.

In addition, Pai Hsien-yung's literary techniques indicate the widespread influence of Western literature in Taiwan during the Cold War. By his admission, Pai was fascinated by modernism—an aesthetic trend that revealed the complexity and multiplicity of modern life by emphasizing people's internal consciousness rather than external reality. Therefore, in *Taipei People*, he delineated not only the visible cityscape but also the invisible mindscapes of the characters. In the stories, Pai was skillful in presenting the characters' inner world through a juxtaposition with external facts. He was also skillful in tracing the characters' changing mindset by comparing the past with the present. These two characteristics of Pai's writing style were a product of the unique cultural environment in Taiwan during the Cold War (Barnhisel 2015, 11–2, 15–6, 182). In this

1 In pinyin, Pai Hsien-yung is Bai Xianyong. In this essay, I use the Wade-Giles transliteration because Pai Hsien-yung himself uses it in all of his English publications.



Figure 2.1. A map of Taipei according to Pai Hsien-yung's *Taipei People*.

essay, I will compare the landscape in Pai's works with its locations. I will also explain the changes in the characters' perspectives according to their identities, memories, lifestyles, careers, and so on. Finally, I will expound the influence of the Cold War on the growth of Taipei, particularly its urban life and its literary production. For readers' convenience, I compiled a map (see fig. 2.1) which shows the various sites that Pai featured in *Taipei People*.

## Military Dependents' Villages

*Taipei People* tells three stories about the military dependents' villages (MDVs)—“A Touch of Green,” “New Year's Eve,” and “Glory's by Blossom Bridge.” “A Touch of Green” is divided into two parts. The first part takes place in Nanking, the capital of China, after the Nationalist Army won the war against Japan. The second part takes place in Taipei, the capital of the Republic of China (ROC), to which the Nationalist government retreated in 1949. The narrator of the first part, an air force wife named Shih-niang,<sup>2</sup> has become a widow in the second part because her husband

2 Shih-niang is a term of affection and esteem used by students to address the wife of their teacher (Pai 2000, 78).

had fallen ill and died by the time they were evacuated (Pai 2000, 38–40, 60, 66). In the first sentence of the second part, she indicates that she lives in East Benevolence Village, an MDV on Changchun Road. Then she reveals her daily life in Taipei: joining recreational activities in the Air Force Life Club, playing mahjong with neighbors, and buying food at the East Gate Market (Pai 2000, 60–74). This revelation involves two real sites in Taipei—the Air Force Life Club and the East Gate Market. The location of the first one was formerly the Station of Inspection of Plants and Grains when Taiwan was occupied by Japan. After WWII, the air force took over the building and transformed it into the Air Force Life Club to provide recreation to servicemen and their families (Wang 2007, 13). In “A Touch of Green,” two pilots’ widows, Shih-niang and Verdancy Chu, who were once neighbors in Nanking, meet each other in the Air Force Life Club. From Shih-niang’s point of view, Chu has turned into a striking singer from a timid middle-school student of the past. During the Civil War, Shih-niang told Chu to “harden her heart” in order to endure the stress of her husband’s death. Now, in Taipei, Chu has truly hardened her heart; she becomes a new person after overcoming the pain of losing her husband.

The other celebrated site in “A Touch of Green” is the East Gate Market. The traditional markets were developed by vendors since the late Qing period. In 1896, the Japanese built the West Gate Market, the first traditional public market in Taipei. Then, more and more traditional markets were built to meet the people’s needs. For example, the East Gate Market was built in 1928, and it still serves the Taipei residents (Taipei City Market Administration Office 2018). In traditional markets, vendors not only sold fresh ingredients but also cooked dishes from different provinces (Huang 1995, 48, 54; Gao 2001, 90). To highlight this function of traditional markets, Pai mentions in the story that Shih-niang bought “marinated delicacies” in the East Gate Market (Pai 2000, 72). In addition to food, vendors adopted unique payment methods. For instance, vendors kept accounts for consumers such that they did not need to pay each time but settled their accounts monthly. This payment method was based on the trust between sellers and buyers, and it required a long-term relationship. In the story, Pai draws attention to this unique payment method, showing his deep understanding of how the traditional markets were run.

In “New Year’s Eve,” readers are led to an MDV on Changchun Road. At the beginning of the story, Pai says that the MDV, East Hsin-yi Village, was full of bungalows. The noise from the houses reflects the poor materials used to build them and the tight living space among the residents (Pai 2000, 82;

Chen 2015, 70–71). The reason why the MDVs were built crudely was because the Nationalist government considered them temporary housing before the military regained the mainland (Cheng and Hsieh 2013, 85; Masahiro 2014, 81–82; Tucker 1994, 53). However, geopolitics got in the way. In the US-ROC Mutual Defense Treaty, the United States insisted that Taiwan not launch military operations against the mainland without American approval. In other words, Chiang Kai-shek's promise to lead his soldiers to return to the mainland remained hollow because Washington wanted the Taiwan Strait to be a peaceful passageway. Since the treaty was signed in 1954, the quality of the buildings in MDVs were improved because they were no longer temporary (Tucker 1994, 40, 45). Correspondingly, more and more people viewed MDVs as their permanent home because they built families there (Wang and Pang-yuan 2004, 10). Furthermore, the longer the villagers stayed in the MDVs, the less likely they would return to the mainland. In fact, most second-generation mainlanders recognized MDVs—where they were born and grew up—as their hometown (Wang and Chi 2004, 4–5). In “New Year’s Eve” Liu Ying, Major Liu’s ten-year-old son, is a prime example of the second-generation mainlander (Pai 2000, 86). Moreover, since the 1960s, with the renovation of old MDVs and building of new MDVs with better quality, the mainlanders’ hope of returning to their former homes on the mainland became less likely, and the long-term peace across the Taiwan Strait made Taiwan a safe place to live (Chen 2015, 56; Chang 2015, 90–91; Cheng and Hsieh 2013, 87; Chang 2021, 20–24). All in all, the rebuilding of MDVs, as well as their residents’ minds, discloses the success of the United States’ foreign and security policy in the Taiwan Strait during the Cold War.

In addition to Major Liu and his family, Lai Ming-sheng (a retired commander) is another typical character from the MDVs. As an old bachelor in Taiwan, Lai is invited by Major Liu—who used to be one of his subordinates on the mainland—to share a reunion dinner on the Chinese New Year’s Eve. When talking about the War of Resistance against Japan, a young cadet born in Taiwan points out that the Battle of Taierchuang was “the glory of our National Army” (Pai 2000, 100–102). To Lai, who participated in the battle, the war was not at all glorious. All he remembers was that his commander’s head was gone in an explosion, he himself was badly hurt, and many of his fellow servicemen died. He never thought that killing others and being killed was glorious. Here, through this episode of the Chinese New Year’s Eve dinner, Pai Hsien-yung touches on the complex feelings of the retired commander whose only ambition, at his advanced age, is to return to mainland China (Pai 2000, 108). Incidentally,

this is also the ambition of Pai's father, Pai Chung-hsi, a Nationalist Army general. According to Pai Hsien-yung, his father continued to develop plans for fighting against communist China until his death in 1966 (Pai 2012, 199–201). Both Lai Ming-sheng in "New Year's Eve" and Pai's own father reveal the mind of the servicemen who retreated to Taiwan from mainland China.

"Glory's by Blossom Bridge" centers on Changchun Road. The narrator is the wife of a major who went missing in action: She and other military dependents were then evacuated to Taiwan (Pai 2000, 260–62). To live in Taipei, she opens a restaurant selling dishes from her hometown, Kwangsi (or Guangxi in pinyin). As a manager, she is familiar with her customers, most of whom live on Changchun Road. She tells stories about her customers through Mr. Lu (a teacher at Changchun Elementary School) and Hsiu-hua (whose husband was a platoon leader), drawing attention to one kind of mainlanders who had been married or engaged in mainland China but lost news of their partner after fleeing to Taiwan. These mainlanders faced the dilemma of founding new families in Taiwan or waiting for their partners to join them (even though there was no way to know whether they were alive). In the end, Hsiu-hua finally accepts her aunt's suggestion to remarry in Taipei while Mr. Lu never gives up hope and keeps contacting his fiancée through his cousin in Hong Kong. Indeed, Hong Kong was an important bridge between the ROC and the PRC after all other links had been cut off. When the refugees in Taiwan would like to contact their families in China, Hong Kong was the most useful channel of communication (Fu 2019, 53–55; Jiang 2006, 17, 21).

The three stories focus on the MDVs in Taipei during the Cold War. To the military, MDVs had been their interim residences in the early 1950s and, subsequently, their permanent home because of cross-strait relations and international politics. Altogether there were 879 MDVs in Taiwan and, among them, 135 MDVs in Taipei according to research in 1982 (Chen 2015, 39). Although most MDVs had been torn down or rebuilt since the 1980s, some MDVs were preserved and even modified into monuments because of their historical and cultural value. Among those that remain, Four Four South Village on Xinyi Road (see fig. 2.2) is the epitome of a preserved MDV. There are two significances of this village. First, it was the first MDV built in Taiwan. Secondly, it sits beneath the highest building in the city, Taipei 101 (Cheng 2013, 96–97). The contrast between these two landmarks reveals the rapid development of Taipei. The preserved MDVs maintain the visible architecture while Pai Hsien-yung's fiction records the invisible residents' mindscapes there.



Figure 2.2. Buildings at Four Four South Village on 9 March 2017 in Taipei, showing Taipei 101 and a new skyscraper being built in the background (by Hal Maa, used under CC BY-SA 4.0).

## High-Class Residences

In *Taipei People*, two generals' homes are in Tianmu, a suburb of Taipei, on the seventh Section of Zhongshan North Road. During the 1950s and 1960s, high-class residences were built in the suburbs of Taipei (Wang and Ju 2014, 435). Some American military housing was in Tianmu, and many foreign embassies as well as government agencies under the Military Assistance Advisory Group were on the second and third sections of Zhongshan North Road (Yuan 2020, 30–33; Zhang et al. 1996, 265; Masahiro 2014, 117–18, 140; Zhuang 2012, 252). The location of these buildings signified the changes in the diplomatic relations between Taiwan and other countries, particularly the US.

“The Dirge of Liang Fu” opens with a description of General Pu’s home in Tianmu. Pai Hsien-yung first describes the dense clusters of purple bamboo around the wall in the inner courtyard where the fallen leaves are a metaphor for death. In fact, General Pu has just attended the funeral of one of his best friends, Wang Meng-yuang. After the courtyard, Pai turns to the interior of the residence. He focuses particularly on the study which was furnished with archaic elegance, including the drawing of a Ming landscape and a pair of calligraphic scrolls written by Hu Han-min (1886–1936), an associate of Sun Yat-sen (Pai 2000, 200–202, 214, 228). From the exhortation on the

scrolls, General Pu explains the significance of the 1911 Revolution and the Northern Expedition. As the commander of the wars, General Pu and his military fellows were not as proud of them as they were after retreating to Taiwan. In fact, their last wish was that their bodies be buried in their birthplaces (Pai 2000, 224). Through General Pu's pensiveness, Pai discloses the complex feelings of the Kuomintang military officers who were forced to assume less grandiose positions in Taipei.

On the other hand, General Wang's son, Chia-chi, is another classic character in *Taipei People*. He immigrated to the United States when he was young and is hence unfamiliar with Chinese etiquette. He represents the Westernized people in Taipei. To be sure, the purpose of American diplomacy is to promote a better understanding of the progress and benefits in the United States. Therefore, the Asia Foundation, Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, etc., provided scholarships to support the Taiwan residents to study in the United States. People who admired the American lifestyle might thus become Westernized and, as such, discard Chinese tradition. It was a common trend among Taiwan immigrants to the United States.

This applies to Pai Hsien-yung himself. He went to the United States to participate in the Iowa Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa and received a master's degree there (Pai 1983, 292; Zhu 2020). Since his college years at National Taiwan University, Pai had been interested in Western literary movements, particularly modernism; nevertheless, he valued Chinese tradition and culture. Thus, in his stories, Pai depicts the landscape of Taipei and the inner voices of Taipei people through modernism. To Pai, historians are responsible for recording real events while writers express the masses' feelings and thoughts (Pai 2002, 222–24). Under the White Terror, no one in Taiwan had the freedom to criticize the government. For this reason, Pai chose to write stories via modernism to express the spirit of the time.

In "Wandering in the Garden, Walking from a Dream," readers are ushered into a general's villa in Tianmu. The opening scene of the story focuses on a series of official black sedans parked at the gate of the villa. Their presence hints that a sumptuous banquet is being served to the visiting dignitaries. Then Pai Hsien-yung describes the scene inside the gate—a deep and wide garden, full of plants and flowers under a clear late-autumn moon. This meticulous description is an obvious contrast to General Pu's garden in deep winter in "The Dirge of Liang Fu" (Pai 2000, 198, 328–30). In addition to the garden, the two-story mansion with a huge, curved terrace is another brilliant spot in "Wandering in the Garden, Walking from a Dream." Modern Western buildings in Taipei were designed by American architects and financed by USAID (Zhang et al. 1996, 260–61; Yin and Chen

2016, 5). Inside the mansion, the drawing room was furnished in a style that blended the Chinese and the Western traditions, signifying an encounter between traditional Chinese culture and modern Western culture. In the earlier stage of the Cold War, most Chinese, especially the first-generation mainlanders, who yearned for superb silks, dishes, operas, and family in their hometowns could not whole-heartedly accept American culture (Pai 2000, 332, 352–54). Thus, Pai uses the materials and experiences in their daily life to highlight their nostalgia—a memory of a past that had disappeared due to urbanization and Westernization.

Besides the nostalgia for Nanking, Madame Chien and Madame Tou's conversation touches on the development of Taipei during the 1950s and 1960s. Tou asks Chien (who lives alone in the south of Taiwan), "Do you find Taipei at all changed?" Chien replies, "They've put up so many tall buildings" (Pai 2000, 334, 380–82). This short but blunt conversation discloses valuable information about Taipei in the early stage of the Cold War. At that time, many tall buildings had been built due to economic growth (Huang 1995, 118). The combined effect of US aid and American technology transformed the landscape of Taipei. The basis of prosperity of Taipei was the expansion of industry and trade driven by Washington's economic assistance. Through Madame Chien's viewpoint, readers can see the strong American impact on Taipei's infrastructure, technology transfer, industrial growth, and foreign investment (Tucker 1994, 54–57).

In "The Eternal Snow Beauty," readers see another high-class residence: the home of Snow Beauty, Yin Hsueh-yen, on the fourth section of Jenai Road. Yin had been the most bewitching taxi dancer at the Paramount ballroom in Shanghai. After moving to Taipei, she decorates her residence as a gathering place for her friends and acquaintances (Pai 2000, 2, 10). According to the *Annals of the District of Daan*, Jenai Road had originally been planned to be a boulevard in 1932, but since 1958 it became an avenue to welcome foreign dignitaries visiting Taipei. In terms of location, Jenai Road is a main artery from Songshan Airport to the Presidential Palace and it has hence become a tree-shaped thoroughfare lined with expensive houses (Bian 2011, 203). In short, Yin's house is in a high-class neighborhood filled with wealthy and powerful residents. Inside the house, Yin's old friends and new acquaintances enjoy having banquets and playing mahjong. While eating and playing, Yin's old friends talk of the good old days in Shanghai. For example, Mr. Wu used to be the general manager of a bank in Shanghai, but he is now an old man in Taipei suffering from progressive diseases. Likewise, Mrs. Sung used to be a celebrated belle in Shanghai, but in Taipei she has become a fat, menopausal woman whose husband has a mistress (Pai 2000, 8–12).

Through the comparison between the past and the present, Pai Hsien-yung explains the reason for the mainlanders' nostalgia. In part, the luxuries of Yin's residence trigger the mainlanders' nostalgic affections by recalling the glory of the past. Yin never lets her house on Jenai Road fall below the impressive standards of Avenue Joffre in Shanghai, making sure that her guests are brought back to the past while they are in her house.

In "The Eternal Snow Beauty," Pai Hsien-yung also mentions some sites in the West Gate Square (Ximeng ding), a famous entertainment and relaxation area in Taipei. To satisfy her female guests, Yin lets them attend Shaohsing plays at the Red Chamber Theater, eat cassia-flavored dumplings at the café "Three-Six-Nine" or purchase fabric at the Hung Hsiang silk emporium (Pai 2000, 10–12). The theater, the restaurant, and the store are pinpointed intentionally. They are, primarily, real entities in the West Gate Square. For instance, the Red Chamber Theater had been built in 1908 and was designated as a historic monument in 1997 (Zhuang 2000, 55; Zhuang 2012, 228–29). In the story, Pai sketches the landscape of the West Gate Square around the 1960s when food, clothes, and entertainment were symbols of the past social positions of mainlanders (Wang and Ju 2014, 459–61, 465–67).

In contrast to the nostalgia of the mainlanders, Hsu Chung-tu, one of Yin's new guests and manager of a large cement corporation, represents the industrialization and modernization of Taipei. In fact, Taiwan Cement Corporation, a real enterprise, was privatized in 1954 and was the first company to issue shares on the stock market in 1962. Furthermore, its seven-story headquarters built on Zhongshan North Road has been a landmark in Taipei since 1960; the Taiwan Cement Corporation made great profits (Chen 1983, 543, 546). In the story, Pai Hsien-yung draws attention to Hsu's excellent profession and Western lifestyle to contrast the mainlanders who live in the past and the group of young entrepreneurs who are building a new Taiwan (Pai 2000, 18–20). At the same time, the success of Hsu (the newly-risen industrial magnate) testifies to the contributions of USAID to the development of Taiwan (Woo-Cummings 1999, 21–23; Tucker 1994, 56–57). At the beginning of the Cold War, Washington focused on helping the military force of the ROC. Later, the USAID mission shifted its focus to developing Taiwan's economy. Since this change in policy, Taiwan's economy has been growing swiftly since the late 1950s (Xiao 1989, 56, 61–63; Peng 1990, 163–65; Tucker 1994, 54–55, 59).

Although Chiang Kai-shek's aim was to reclaim China instead of constructing Taiwan, the Nationalist government did lay down the foundation for Taiwan's economic growth. Since the early 1950s, the scope of US economic assistance has expanded from public sectors to private enterprises. Moreover,

a part of US aid has come from loans instead of grants. Yin Chung-jung (1903–63), the minister of economy who consistently promoted free trade, cautioned that the entrepreneurs should be careful in using the aid, and that they must find a way to repay the loans. Notably, since 1958 the output of private manufacturing enterprises had exceeded the public sector's (Peng 1990, 163–65; Yin 1963, 290–92; Xiao 1989, 53). The economic growth and global trade caused Taiwan to be an indispensable part of the capitalist world. Moreover, economic development since the late 1950s has become the basis of the democratic system in the 1980s (Hung 2009, 24–25, 52; King 2004, 104).

### Old Mansions and Faculty Quarters

“Ode to Bygone Days” is a story about General Li and his family. His home is in Lane 120 on Nanking East Road and there is a dark bronze plaque on the gate telling visitors that they have reached “Li Mansion.” The narrator describes the house in detail emphasizing the fact that it was dilapidated. For example, the paint of the double door is cracked, and mold spots appear everywhere. In addition, some tufts of wild grass spring out of the crevices in the ragged eaves and the glass lamp over the gate is broken (Pai 2000, 178). The description of dilapidation indicates not only the downfall of Li's family but also the disillusionment of General Li. Indeed, he suffers a great deal: his wife is dead, his son has a mental illness, and his daughter's behavior brings dishonor to the family. The housemaids who had served them are heartbroken because they witnessed the decline of the family.

Pai Hsien-yung wrote “Ode to Bygone Days” in 1969, when Taiwan underwent rapid industrialization. The story builds on a stark contrast between the dilapidated Li Mansion and the booming economy in Taipei. As a fast-growing city in East Asia, Taipei in the 1960s was full of tall modern buildings constructed by national and international corporations such as Formosa Plastics Corporation and Muhua Union Chemical Industrial Corporation (Chen 1983, 568). These prosperous enterprises are mentioned in “The Eternal Snow Beauty” through the character Hsu Chung-tu. Here, readers are reminded, once more, of the rapid growth of Taipei even though some of its residents prefer to live in the past.

This juxtaposition of the growth of Taipei and its disillusioned residents is also found in “Winter Night.” In the story, readers are drawn to Professor Yu's quarters on Wenchou Street near National Taiwan University. In the story, the narrator describes the faculty quarters as all old structures left

over from the period of the Japanese occupation (Pai 2000, 386). The Japanese architecture, usually wooden bungalows, was part of the old cityscape of Taipei. Professor Yu's damp and decayed quarters symbolize the early years after the Nationalist government's retreat to Taiwan—a period when the island was transitioning from a Japanese colony to a frontier of the Cold War. Later, these old houses were replaced by reinforced concrete buildings due to industrialization and urbanization (Lung 1967, 168, 172).

In addition to architecture, "Winter Night" points at Washington's cultural diplomacy during the Cold War. Professor Yu tries his best to receive funding for his research and he finally receives grants from the Ford Foundation as part of the US's attempt to promote cross-cultural communication and train technical experts (Tucker 1994, 80–83; Chao 2001, 79–80). Yu, however, has his own reason for going abroad to teach there. He wants to accumulate sufficient money to pay for his son's tuition in the United States. The problem for Yu is that his son insists on studying engineering abroad even though he does not get the scholarship. Like other young people in Taiwan, Yu's son sees the United States as an advanced country where people can learn the newest technology (Pai 2000, 410–14).<sup>3</sup> As a result, both Yu and his son are caught in a bind: they must earn enough money to go abroad to seek a new life. In this way, the educational programs (especially those that sent Taiwanese students abroad) are connected to economic growth, and, consequently, these cultural connections strengthen the ties between the people in Taiwan and people in the US (Tucker 1994, 93).

Wu Chu-kuo, professor at the University of California, represents the opposite example of an overseas Chinese scholar in the United States during the Cold War. In "Winter Night," both Yu and Wu were students at Peking University and the leaders of the May Fourth Movement in 1919. They had striven for democracy for more than half a century. Wu pursues his studies in the United States one year before the Chinese Communist Revolution and then stays there for twenty years (Pai 2000, 390). As a world-renowned historian, Wu gives lectures all over the world and publishes many books. Thus, Yu thinks that Wu was the most successful leader of the May Fourth Movement. After hearing Yu's admiration, Wu does not know how to respond. Wu mutters that the totalitarian regime of the Nationalist government had been his shame because his goal had been to promote democracy and liberty. As a professor at the University of California, he did not achieve his goals for bringing democracy and liberty to his country; nor did he have the opportunity for teaching Chinese students about democracy and liberty.

3 For the impact of the American cultural diplomacy, see chapter 1 of this volume.

Furthermore, when talking about his teaching plan in the United States, Wu says, "Most of the courses I give at universities abroad only cover our history up to the Tang or the Song dynasties, I have never taught a course on the Republican era." In Wu's mind, he was a deserter from the ROC and hence not qualified to teach the history of the era (Pai 2000, 396, 404).

Notably, Wu Chu-kuo is not an entirely fictional character. Pai Hsien-yung points out that Hu Shih (1891–1962), a leader of the May Fourth Movement, is the model for Wu Chu-kuo. Knowing Hu's powerlessness against the autocracy of Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975), Pai understood that the spirit of the May Fourth Movement had passed, and democracy did not exist in Taiwan. Pai's disillusionment can be illustrated through the famous Lei Chen incident. In the 1950s, Hu and Lei Chen (1897–1979) repeatedly advocated that the Nationalist government adopt democracy. In 1960, to the disappointment of the liberals, Chiang Kai-shek planned to assume a straight third term of presidency. Lei and many intellectuals opposed Chiang's decision. Subsequently, Lei was charged with sedition and jailed. Some of Lei and Hu's mutual friends condemned Hu for not rescuing Lei. In fact, Hu did have a long private talk with Chiang about Lei. Hu claimed that as a member of the Free World, the Nationalist government had to follow the principles of democracy. Nevertheless, as an autocratic ruler, Chiang did not accept Hu's advice. Therefore, Hu was disappointed (Zhang 1990, 286–90).

Pai's purpose for writing "Winter Night" was not to criticize Hu but to keep a record of the confrontation between authoritarianism and liberalization. In fact, this confrontation was partly a result of the ambiguity of US policy. On one hand, the Americans sought to develop democracy and liberty in Taiwan. On the other, the US government put premium on Chiang's stewardship in keeping Taiwan safe and secure. Therefore, the United States did not insist upon democratization and liberalization of Taiwan; rather the United States supported the anticommunism of the Nationalist government (Tucker 1994, 77–78). Even if Washington could not force the KMT to democratize the political system, how could Hu Shih do it? Nonetheless, Hu was frustrated when the liberals in Taiwan were unjustly treated because he strove for democracy for almost half a century. His sense of loss is described by Pai through the mind of Wu Chu-kuo in "Winter Night."

To address the ambiguous political development in Taiwan, in "Winter Night" Pai Hsien-yung draws attention to two landmarks, Songshan Airport and Academia Sinica (Pai 2000, 388–90, 418). First, Songshan Airport was the main international airport in Taiwan by 1979 (Chen 2011, 239–40). Famous and influential figures who arrived in Songshan Airport were interviewed by newspaper reporters and welcomed by government officials. As a famous

scholar and an influential official, Hu Shih was interviewed in Songshan Airport, and in the interviews he discussed international relations, freedom of speech, and other issues. Second, Academia Sinica, which was the national academy founded in Nanking in 1928, was relocated to the Nangang District in Taipei in 1954. Hu Shih was invited to return to Taiwan from the United States to be the president of Academia Sinica. He accepted the job and was president there from 1957 to 1962 (Chen 2009, 206–8; Zhang 1990, 285). With reference to the political development in Taiwan, Pai intentionally wrote about these two sites in “Winter Night.”

### West Gate Square and Taipei New Park

As many visitors to Taipei know, West Gate Square is a busy entertainment district and a tourist destination to this day. In “The Eternal Snow Beauty,” Pai Hsien-yung tells us that West Gate Square was much more than a tourist destination. According to Pai, it was, at one point, a shopper and opera fan’s paradise for mainlanders who were nostalgic about their past. In “The Last Night of Taipan Chin” and “Love’s Lone Flower,” Pai discloses yet another dimension of West Gate Square—its ballrooms and wine houses that came alive at night. These erotic venues with sex-related services had been built in the Japanese-occupation era, and they were still thriving after the island was returned to the ROC (Berry and Tsai 2016, 158; Zhuang 2012, 225). These erotic venues were joint collaborations between businesspeople in Taiwan and Japan that catered to new customers of the Cold War. Underlying these developments was geopolitics. Due to the Cold War, Washington forced Japan to shun Communist China and to establish diplomatic relations with Taiwan to secure US military bases in Japan and to protect Taiwan (Tucker 1994, 33, 53). When Japanese businesspeople visited Taipei, ballrooms and wine houses were part of their itinerary. In addition, the number of ballrooms and pubs increased rapidly since 1965 because Taipei became the holiday resort for American soldiers in the Vietnam War. These erotic venues not only assisted the tourist industry but also afforded employment to large numbers of females in Taipei (Wu 2006, 9–10).<sup>4</sup> Based on economic growth, the sex industry was good for a developing country. Nevertheless, what was in the taxi dancers and sing-song girls’ lives and minds? Pai’s fiction answers this question partly.

4 For further discussion on the growth of the sex industry in Taiwan during the Cold War, see Chapter 3 of this volume.

In “The Last Night of Taipan Chin,” Jolie Chin (a famous taxi dancer) is about to retire from her ballroom career in Taipei. In retirement, she would marry the boss of a rubber factory in Singapore (Pai 2000, 118–20). On her last workday, she knows that Phoenix Chu, a taxi dancer to whom she taught all the tricks of the ballroom trade, conceives a baby after attending to her guest, a student from Hong Kong studying at National Taiwan University. Even though the man already left her and went back to Hong Kong, Chu still wants to bear the baby because she has fallen in love with him (Pai 2000, 126–32). Coincidentally, Chin herself had the same experience when she was young. To drive home his point, Pai employs the style of stream of consciousness to capture the complex feelings of these two taxi dancers who suffered so much and yet saw hope in the future. The complex, contradictory feelings of the two dancers are crystalized in Chin’s brief but powerful utterances: “A taxi dancer like you, with a fatherless, nameless by-blow in tow, who’ll ever want you?” “I’ll take you to go get rid of that lump in your belly,” and “Who says taxi dancers aren’t human? Their hearts can melt, too” (Pai 2000, 130–32). To show her contempt and her courage, Chin spits on Chu and speaks her mind. In this short but dramatic episode, Pai shows that Chin was shrewish on the surface while she was sympathetic with Chu: Her sympathy comes from remembrance. Through Chu’s experience, Chin is brought back to the memory of her first lover—someone whom she absolutely loved (Pai 2000, 128–32, 142).

As a skillful writer, Pai Hsien-yung makes the nationality of these two taxi dancers’ lovers a potent symbol. Jolie Chin’s fiancé owns a factory in Singapore while Phoenix Chu’s lover is from Hong Kong. During the Cold War, Washington not only provided academic resources to Taiwanese people but also demanded Taiwan offer educational opportunities to overseas Chinese to stop them from going to Communist China (Tucker 1994, 83; Wong 2016). The various scholarships and grants that appear in “Winter Night” and “The Dirge of Liang Fu” are evidence of US support in its cultural diplomacy. On the other hand, Taipei regarded Hong Kong as a part of the ROC after retreating from mainland China and hence had allocated education funds to subsidize Hong Kong students to study in Taiwan. Some famous scholars and writers from Hong Kong received their bachelor of arts degrees from National Taiwan University. For instance, Joseph Shiu-ming Lau (1934–2023), Wai-lim Yip (1937–), and Cheng-yi Dai (1935–2021, his penname is Dai Tian) all edited the literary journal *Modern Literature* with Pai when they studied in Taipei. After graduation, they maintained communications with one other and created the Sinophone literary community around the world. As for Singapore, one of the Four Asian Tigers, it enjoyed rapid economic growth during the Cold War

and succeeded in attracting overseas Chinese to conduct business there. Here we see that Pai skillfully draws attention to international relations in Asia to elucidate the complexity of Taipei during the Cold War (Wang 1994, 154).

In addition to international affairs, there are biographical sketches in Pai's stories showing their broad dimensions. For instance, the protagonist of "Love's Lone Flower" is a sing-song girl. Pai admitted that he had been to Mayflower, a famous wine house in Taipei, and the sorrowful look on one sing-song girl's face attracted his attention to write "Love's Lone Flower" (Berry and Tsai 2016, 158). Fittingly, Pai authored the story in the first person. In the story, the narrator is a woman who had been a wine house girl in Shanghai who then fled to Taiwan to be a manager of a wine house in Taipei. This woman sketches the interior landscape of the wine house briefly and then turns her attention to the helplessness of sing-song girls. For example, Dainty's mother had gone insane while her father raped her, and she could not help but leave her home in Suao to become a sing-song girl in Taipei. She meekly accepts the forced drinks and sexual harassment from her guests. Knowing Dainty's situation, the narrator takes her back to her apartment to take care of her (Pai 2000, 230–32, 236–68).

The relationship between female mainlanders and Taiwanese is a plot in both "Love's Lone Flower" and "The Last Night of Taipan Chin." In "Love's Lone Flower," the narrator tries to protect Dainty, whereas in "The Last Night of Taipan Chin," Jolie Chin gives Phoenix Chu financial support (Pai 2000, 126, 240). Pai clearly points out that Dainty and Chu's hometowns are both in Taiwan, even though their helpers are from the mainland. This is to show that in the entertainment industry there was a keen sense of camaraderie among the female workers. The mutual help between mainlanders and Taiwanese was driven by the suffering that females endured in an unjust society. Taken together, Pai deals indirectly with the issues of gender and race during the Cold War.

In "A Sky Full of Bright, Twinkling Stars," Pai turns from female workers in the entertainment industry to gays. The story unfolds around Taipei New Park, a huge park established by the Japanese in 1907.<sup>5</sup> The park had been a base for the male homosexual community for at least four decades (Liou 2003, 193; Allen 2007, 168–69). In this story, gays circle around the

5 The original name of the park was Taihoku New Park during the Japanese colonial period. In 1945, it was renamed Taipei New Park by the Nationalist government. A protest incident happened at the park on 28 February 1947. This incident was debated openly in the 1990s as Taiwan entered its modern democracy period. In 1996, the park was renamed 228 Peace Memorial Park, after the 228 Peace Monument was officially unveiled there (Allen 2007, 174; Zhuang 2000, 75, 79).

lotus pond in the park when night falls. This insinuates that homosexuality was unacceptable because they could not show up until night. Also, homosexuality could not be discussed explicitly until the 1980s. Nevertheless, Pai depicted gay life through the technique of modernism since the 1960s. In addition, this story features aborigines, mainlanders, and foreigners in the gay community (Pai 2000, 312–14, 322). Like the female workers in the entertainment industry, Pai indicates that there was a racial integration in the homosexual community in Taipei.

## Conclusion

As a novelist with an acute sense of time and space, Pai Hsien-yung wrote in a style that captured historicity and reality (Yan 1970, 164). For this reason, *Taipei People* presents glimpses of the cityscape of Taipei of the 1950s and 1960s. Pai often refers to an existing site in Taipei at the beginning of his stories to give readers a sense of space. For example, the Western high-class residence in Tianmu is a symbol of US aid. The construction and reconstruction of MDVs implies the change of the return-to-the-mainland military plan and the urbanization of Taipei. Ballrooms and wine houses were venues of cooperation between businesspeople in Taiwan and Japan, as well as military collaboration between Washington and Taipei during the Vietnam War. Overall, the location and functions of these sites are real. They highlight one important skill of Pai's—his blending of the real and unreal, the local and global, and the personal and collective.

In terms of his writing style, Pai Hsien-yung is adept at using modernist literary techniques to describe his characters' inner worlds. A casual conversation is enough for him to reveal the complex feelings of the first-generation mainlander who wants to return to the mainland while their children view Taiwan as their hometown. A few sentences are sufficient for him to capture the disillusionment of middle-aged ladies who find out that they have lost beauty, wealth, and social positions. Running throughout the fourteen stories in *Taipei People* is the theme of nostalgia. Although there are many forms of nostalgia in the characters of Pai's stories, there is one thing in common. Pai's characters not only suffer from painful losses of their home and their land; they also face the difficulty of accepting the passing of an era—a time when the Republic of China ruled the mainland and the KMT was a political force striving to reshape the country.

There is no doubt that the fate of Taipei was shaped by the US during the Cold War. In *Taipei People*, the US influence on Taipei is clearly shown

through its infrastructure, economy, and cityscape. First, the United States preserved Taiwan as a bastion of democracy against Communist China. Thus, the Taiwan Strait became the divide between the Free World and the Communist world. (Tucker 1994, 5). Second, US aid helped to promote industry, facilitate technology transfer, and expand infrastructure. Moreover, American officials opened the island to foreign investment and international trade. They also encouraged people in Taiwan to establish private enterprises, which were crucial to the economic expansion in the 1960s. More importantly, the close economic link between Taipei and Washington made Taiwan a member of the Free World and the global capitalist system. In the end, because of industrialization and urbanization, Taipei became a prosperous and stable city, whose citizens viewed it as their permanent home.

Finally, the cultural collaboration between Taipei and Washington during the Cold War changed the cultural outlook of the people of Taiwan. In his stories, Pai Hsien-yung repeatedly writes about education programs, and his own experience of studying abroad. In his stories, Pai indicates that the United States provided scholarships and grants for people in Taiwan to study abroad. In return, these students and scholars became the backbone of the modernization of Taiwan. In literature, the United States Information Service subsidized the translation and publication projects to facilitate the communication with writers in the Free World (United States Information Agency, 1998, 26).<sup>6</sup> As a result, the technique of modernism, which Pai heavily uses to portray the characters' feelings, became a dominant style of writing in Taiwan. Moreover, the English version of *Taipei People*, published by Indiana University Press in 1982, is another example of cross-cultural encounters between Taiwan and the United States (Pai 2000, x). In short, *Taipei People* is a testimony to American cultural diplomacy and the rapid growth of Taiwan during the Cold War. It documents the cityscape of Taipei and the inner feelings of its citizens at a time of rapid growth and dramatic changes.

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6 For a discussion of the role of the USIS, see chapter 1 of this book.

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### 3. The Frontier Behind the Curtain: Contextualizing Eileen Chang’s “A Return to the Frontier”

*Chia-chi Chao*

**Abstract:** Eileen Chang’s “A Return to the Frontier,” about her trip to Taiwan in the 1960s—with “frontier” as a clue to contextualize the transformation of Taipei’s cityscape during the Cold War—is the subject of this essay. After the 1949 divide, northern Taipei was geopolitically reshaped into a stronghold to reiterate the authority of Free China. While integrating into the US-led regional security framework and the initiation of the Rest and Recuperation (R&R) program, Taipei served as an eroticized frontier subordinated to its American patron. By focusing on the paradoxical status of Taiwan as a frontier during the Cold War, I examine Taiwan literary narratives that reflect on sex tourism, national identity, and public anxiety about Taipei’s modernizing cityscape with US aid.

**Keywords:** Eileen Chang, frontier, R&R, Taipei, US aid

#### Introduction

Eileen Chang (1920–95) is regarded as the most widely known and extraordinary writer in modern Chinese literature. Renowned for her ingenious urban romances written during Japanese-occupied Shanghai in the 1940s, Chang fled to the British colony Hong Kong in 1952, three years after the establishment of Communist China, and then relocated to the US in 1955, where she stayed for the rest of her life. During her early settlement in the US, Chang and her literary works lost public attention until they were rediscovered by the Chinese American scholar Chih-tsing Hsia (1921–2013) through his

epochal monograph *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction* published in 1961 (Hsia 1999, 389–431).

As a bourgeois intellectual who grew up in early twentieth-century Shanghai and emigrated to Taiwan after the 1949 divide, Hsia demonstrates a clear anti-Communist stance in *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*. From this political perspective, Hsia evaluates Chang's novel *The Rice-Sprout Song* (1950) as an excellent work representing the suffering of peasants due to food shortages caused by the tyranny of communism. The book also elaborates on the exquisite textuality of Chang's writings by adopting New Criticism. Hsia further extols Chang's literary accomplishments for their counternarratives against the revolutionary accounts of national salvation and enlightenment, which had been progressively advocated since the May Fourth Movement.

Hsia's rediscovery and evaluation of Eileen Chang's works has attracted academic attention to the writer and her fiction. More and more studies have been published and popularized among scholars and readers in the Sinosphere, particularly Taiwan. These discourses include not only Taiwanese readers' appreciation of Chang's literary talent but also their interest in her legendary life and wartime urban romances, which have extensively aroused their imagination of modern Shanghai, concurring with her readers' own experience of contemporary Taiwan (Lee 1999, 367–404).

In fact, Eileen Chang visited Taiwan in the early 1960s without the faintest idea that her literary reputation would flourish on the island. In the autumn of 1961, Chang flew from the US to Hong Kong to discuss film scripts with Stephen Soong (1919–96), her career partner, who served in the screenwriting committee of the Motion Picture & General Investment Co., Ltd. (MP&GI). She came to Taiwan at the invitation of Richard M. McCarthy (1920–2008), director of the Taiwan branch office of the United States Information Service (USIS). In Taipei, Chang attended an informal reception hosted by Mr. McCarthy and undergraduate writers from National Taiwan University (NTU). Thereafter, Wang Chen-ho (1940–90), a junior fellow at NTU served as her guide during a brief visit to eastern Taiwan. However, Chang's Taiwan trip was unexpectedly cut short due to an urgent screenplay task in Hong Kong (Kao 2011, 249–58).

After a short trip to Taiwan and a five-month stay in Hong Kong, Chang returned to the US in the spring of 1962. In March 1963, her travel essay titled "A Return to the Frontier," an account of her journey to Asia, was published in the US magazine *The Reporter* (Chang 1963, 38–41). The title reveals that Chang's trip to Taiwan and Hong Kong was a return and revisit. In the first part, Chang briefly chronicles her travel experience in Taiwan. She initially

spent one night in the northern suburbs of Taipei and then embarked on a sightseeing tour in the countryside of Hualien. While the narration of the Taiwan trip is concise, the second part of her revisit to Hong Kong is a more detailed account of the dense cityscape caused by the influx of refugees fleeing from mainland China since the 1949 divide. From Chang's perspective, Hong Kong had transformed into a populous and metropolitan city, unlike the earlier colonial landscape that Chang had appreciated during her campus life at the University of Hong Kong.

The existing academic discussion on "A Return to the Frontier" has predominantly centered on diaspora writing and the ambivalent self-identity of Chang toward her postwar return to Hong Kong. This discussion reviews whether the Hong Kong experience played a critical role in Chang's life and literary career. However, scant attention has been paid to Chang's account of her visit in Taiwan. Although the account of the Taiwan trip was briefer and plainer than her vivid depiction of Hong Kong, "A Return to the Frontier" is noteworthy for Chang's observations of Taiwan as one of the frontiers in Cold War Asia.

"Frontier"—the word that Chang uses in the title—intriguingly conveys a dual message of Hong Kong and Taiwan's political situation as important border towns and the borderline of the division between the capitalist and communist worlds during the Cold War. On one hand, "frontier," which refers to the liminal zone of indeterminate identity, represents the decentralized political position where Hong Kong and Taiwan are located on the outer edge of mainland China. On the other hand, the term exemplifies the geographic and symbolic periphery of the imperatives and denotes the irreplaceable status of Hong Kong and Taiwan as significant frontlines of the US-led democratic camp against communist China (Kao 2011, 257; Duara 2016, 211).

Since Chang uses "frontier" as a key concept to decode Taiwan's dynamics during the Cold War, and I aim to review Chang's writing in "A Return to the Frontier" with her reference to this term as an important clue. The goal is to explore Chang's implicit narrative about her visit to Taipei by elaborating on the connotation of "frontier," which could further clarify Taiwan's complex situation as the postwar pivotal frontier of a former Japanese colony that became a site of contestation between Kuomintang (KMT) sovereignty and US-led capitalist alliance.

First, I scrutinize Chang's account in "A Return to the Frontier" of northern Taipei where she stayed during her visit. As the description implies, northern Taipei and the outer Yangmingshan (Mount Yangming) are strategically important areas, exhibiting the geopolitics of the KMT government then in retreat. Second, I follow the erotic message brought by Chang's mention

of a general, and “feminine companionship,” and further investigate the contradictory nature of Taipei, claimed as the legitimate capital of Free China by the Republic of China (ROC), versus its status as the Asian erotic frontier during the period of US aid to Taiwan in the Cold War. By outlining Taipei’s transforming cityscape during the mid-twentieth century, I explore the existence of Taiwan, in real and literary representations, as a Cold War Asian frontier, co-built by the KMT’s nationalism and US-led capitalist globalism.

### **The Retreated Frontier: Yangmingshan and the Geopolitical Transformation of Postwar Taipei**

In the autumn of 1961, Eileen Chang stayed in Taiwan after her long-haul flight from the US to Hong Kong. Chang came to Taiwan to collect material for her English novel *The Young Marshal*, as the subject was based on the famous historical figure Chang Hsüeh-liang (1901–2001). Growing up as the heir of a renowned warlord in northeast China, Chang Hsüeh-liang was appointed as a republican general in 1928 to assist in Chiang Kai-shek’s (1887–1975) Northern Expedition and the reunification of China. However, due to his betrayal of Chiang in the Xi’an Incident in 1936, Chang was imprisoned for life, making him one of the most controversial figures in the history of republican China. After the KMT was decisively defeated on the mainland, Chang Hsüeh-liang was transferred to Taiwan in 1946. During his captivity, Chang was first remanded to custody in Hsinchu and then in Kaohsiung during the 1950s, after which he moved to Beitou, Taipei’s northern suburbs, where he lived under constant surveillance for the rest of his life until 1990.

When Eileen Chang visited Taiwan in 1961, Chang Hsüeh-liang remained under house arrest in Taipei. Despite her intent to execute a field survey for her novel, Eileen Chang did not get the opportunity to meet the legendary marshal during her stay in Taiwan. However, in “A Return to the Frontier,” Chang wrote about her first night’s accommodation in Taipei, implying that where she was lodged related to Chang Hsüeh-liang and his political confinement in Beitou (Chang 1963, 38):

They lodged me in a mountain inn. I got to the General’s Suite, where the generals stay when they come uphill to report to the Generalissimo, who lives a few steps away across the road. The suite was reached through a series of deserted little courtyards, ... in the bathroom a tap of sulphur

water constantly running out of a stone lion mouth ... There were rattan furniture on the tatami flooring ... Finally, I had to get up near dawn to sleep on the ledge of the honor recess, where in Japanese living rooms the best vase and picture scroll are displayed.

The “General’s Suite,” as Eileen Chang points out, refers to the type of room that she was lodged in, which retained the colonial Japanese style. She also mentions the “Generalissimo,” the highest military rank, referring to Chiang Kai-shek, to whom generals reported. The description of her accommodation in Taipei hints at the transformation of Taiwan’s postwar geopolitics, particularly in the Yangmingshan district, from its former status as a Japanese colonial territory to becoming a military stronghold under the KMT government during Chiang’s presidency.

Yangmingshan is a natural scenic area renowned for its characteristic mountain slopes and mineral resources. Originally called Grass Mountain (Caoshan in Mandarin), Yangmingshan covers a group of mountains, including Mount Shamao and Mount Qixing, and Tatun volcanic terraces to the north of the Taipei Basin. The origin of the name “Beitou” can be traced back to the language of the early plains Indigenous peoples and is commonly believed to mean “witch” to refer to the women in charge of ritual activities. The volcanic springs swathe the region in white smoke, and the grotesque scenery seems to evoke bewildering images of spells cast by haunting witches.

The exploration of Beitou began in the late-seventeenth century when Taiwan was incorporated into the Qing Empire as part of the Fujian Province. Officials conducted local observations of Taiwan, and bureaucratic reports recorded Beitou as virgin ground with unique natural features. However, it was not until Taiwan was established as a province under the Qing dynasty in 1887 that many Han Chinese immigrants from southern Fujian immigrated to Taiwan. Increasing migration and settlements led to further exploitation of Beitou, particularly mining and tea planting.

With its rich mining resources, Beitou underwent further development after Taiwan was ceded to Japan following the defeat of the Qing dynasty in the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895. Leveraging the bounty of hot springs, Japanese colonizers actively introduced the bathing culture, thereby establishing Beitou as a preferred leisure spot and health resort for Japanese nobles and the imperial army. In 1896, the Emoji Inn opened as the first privately run hot spring resort. In 1907, the Long Nice Hot Spring, a semipublic bathhouse supplying medical treatment to the imperial army was established. In 1913, the Beitou public *sentō* was built, followed by Prince

Hirohito's (1901–89) royal visit to Taiwan in 1923, which contributed toward boosting Beitou's hot spring industry (Zhuo 2002, 6–22).

Beitou gained acclaim as a leisurely wonderland (*youle jing*) under Japanese rule, symbolizing the success of Japanese colonial achievements in Taiwan. Specifically, Japan's bathing culture that developed in Beitou was regarded as the materialization of both the philosophical aesthetics of Zen and the traditional Yamato spirit. For Japanese colonizers, the pleasurable experience of bathing highlighted the exotic appeal of Taiwan, and the so-called Formosa, the beautiful island, became the utopia where its conquerors' desires were satisfied (Sakai 2018, 41–85).

Moving into the mid-twentieth century, the Kazan Hotel, a hot springs establishment in Beitou, highlights Japanese colonialism and imperialist power intertwined with the rise of militarism. Constructed in the 1920s in the traditional Japanese style, the hotel was an elegant wooden structure and a privately run upscale resort targeting upper-class Japanese. The main building was initially designed with a variety of bathrooms catering to diverse needs. In 1938, a luxurious banquet hall was built on the second floor behind the main building, incorporating geisha performances and escort services. During World War II, Kazan was requisitioned as an exclusive official club for the Imperial Japanese Army. It is said that aviators from the Divine Wind Special Attack Unit (Kamikaze) were given special treatment to spend their last pleasurable night with their female companions in Kazan before sacrificing themselves for the empire (Bian 1994, 15). Kazan's conversion from a high-class resort hotel to a Japanese military officers' club mirrored the status of colonized Taiwan—an existence marked by eroticism and femininity under Japan's military and masculine dominion.

While Beitou and the larger Yangmingshan area were established as royal gardens, exemplifying Japan's imperial conquest of Taiwan during the first half of the twentieth century, they were transformed into exclusive political strongholds after the KMT government retreated to Taiwan in 1949. With Yangmingshan's clustered mountains providing the priority concern of military defense, the Nationalist government, in its first year of relocating to Taiwan, established the Yangmingshan Administrative Bureau, a special institution responsible for the presidential residence, military intelligence, and national mobilization. As a crucial administrative body to protect Chiang Kai-shek's leadership, the bureau was also a special zone covering the Shilin and Beitou districts, where secret intelligence agencies, military training divisions, and other official bodies were subordinated to the KMT's party-state system to strengthen national security.

In addition to the politically functional resetting of the Yangmingshan area, the naming of Yangmingshan itself reflected the political ambition of Chiang Kai-shek to break free from Taiwan's colonial history and restore the traditional Han Chinese ethical glory in the face of the communist threat. Distinct from the originally straightforward yet simple name "Grass Mountain," "Yangming" was chosen to honor Wang Yangming (1472–1529), an esteemed neo-Confucian philosopher, scholar, and master during the Ming dynasty. The renaming of Yangmingshan manifested Chiang Kai-shek's identification as a devoted follower of Confucian teachings. More significantly, this renaming established a symbolic connection with the Confucian master and Confucianism itself. Just as Confucianism symbolized Chinese cultural orthodoxy, the Nationalist government under Chiang Kai-shek, who professed complete embrace and inheritance of Confucianism, represented the only legitimate polity of true China (Tozer 1970, 81–99).

### **Cultural Reconstruction: "Implanting China" and "Uprooting Japan"**

As early as the 1930s, Chiang and his Nationalist government had launched the New Life Movement across China, drawing on neo-Confucian resources to unite national consciousness and gain rhetorical and ideological advantages in the rising conflict with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). "New Life" denotes precisely disciplined behaviors and the national cultivation of social morality rooted in Confucian teachings, with the main idea summarized as four essential virtues: proper rites (*li*), righteousness (*yi*), honesty (*lian*), and self-respect (*chi*) (Dirlik 1975, 945–80; Clinton 2017, 128–60). After the 1949 retreat to Taiwan, the KMT continued to promote the moral practice of the New Life Movement and expanded it into a comprehensive nationwide campaign of cultural reform based on the Confucian model, culminating in the 1966 Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement (Wang 1987, 66–90).

Although the Chinese Cultural Renaissance Movement was proposed in the late 1960s in response to the cultural destruction caused by the CCP during the Cultural Revolution, the KMT-led Republic of China (ROC) government's attempt to secure its political and cultural legitimacy by implementing a structured plan for constructing traditional Chinese culture in Yangmingshan dates back to the 1950s. After undergoing strenuous relocation and preparation work following the 1949 divide, the National Palace Museum, which shared its roots with the Palace Museum of the Forbidden City in Beijing, was reinstated in Taipei's Shilin district as a

central institution dedicated to preserving Chinese cultural heritage in the 1960s. The National Palace Museum's abundant collection of artifacts and antiques of historical value is an embodiment of Han Chinese cultural legacy. Moreover, its architectural design, modelled on the Beijing's Palace Museum of the Forbidden City, signified the ROC government's efforts to vie for the status of the sole legitimate inheritor of Chinese history (Lippe 1955, 54–60).

Many more such landmarks were constructed in the Yangmingshan area. As a visualized entity of Chinese traditional architectural aesthetics, these attractions added cultural credibility to the ROC's reign. A notable representation is the Chungshan Hall, built in the Beitou district in 1965 in memory of Dr. Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), the founder of the KMT party and father of the nation in the ROC. The hall was patterned on ancient Chinese philosophical thinking that Heaven was round, and Earth was square, and its artistic decorations in traditional design were believed to bring fortune and prosperity. In addition to the palatial characteristics, its political importance was manifested by the Chinese culture hall situated on the ground floor, which could accommodate over a thousand people and was used as a venue for the general meetings of the national assembly from the early 1970s until it was replaced by direct democracy in Taiwan in the 1990s.

Furthermore, to shape Taiwan's anti-Communist political bulwark and achieve the goal of "retaking the Chinese mainland" during the Cold War, the ROC government was committed to "uprooting Japan" and "implanting China" (Huang 2007, 15–20; Yang 1993, 77–113). For instance, the Taiwan Jingū, the grand shrine that was erected on the Jiantan Mountain in the southern side of the Yangmingshan area, was the sacred place of worship to symbolize Japanese imperial domination and majestic authority in colonial Taiwan. At its vantage point, the shrine overlooked Taipei city and extended its central axis to the main city avenue Chokushi kaidō, passing through the Meiji bridge at the foot of Jiantan mountain. However, the shrine was severely damaged during a cargo plane crash in 1944 and was never fully repaired following Japan's surrender after World War II. During the 1950s, the postwar KMT government built the Grand Hotel on the site of the ruined shrine, creating a Chinese palace-style five-star hotel to eliminate Japanese colonial elements and reinstall Chinese culture. Constructed as a fourteen-story edifice with a resplendent red-and-gold-painted exterior, and the interior decoration with premium wooden furniture, carved and lacquered pillars, and walls with dragon and plum-bloom patterns, the Grand Hotel has not only functioned as a window to display Chinese architectural extravagance for visiting international dignitaries but also legitimized the

ROC government by successfully embodying and visualizing traditional architectural styles and ideals.

Likewise, in 1969 the Yuanshan Shrine near the Taiwan Jingū was replaced by the National Martyrs' Shrine to reify the sublime and dignified spirit of Nationalist patriotism. In its Chinese name, Zhonglie Ci, *ci* means the ancestral temple, while *zhong* and *lie* refer respectively to the virtues of loyalty and righteousness to the country. Enshrined were martyrs and national heroes who were killed during the KMT's revolutionary history or the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–45) that had caused long-term ethical trauma. In addition, the concept of kinship with Han Chinese consanguinity was enshrined by deifying the Confucian masters and the Yellow Emperor, the mythological ancestor. By replacing the Japanese imperial shrine with a national/Nationalist temple, the KMT government endeavored to reshape collective memory and ignite strong patriotism and ethnic unity among the Taiwanese people. While the colonizers became aggressors, the imperial Japanese civilians had to be transformed into new republican citizens loyal to the Nationalist Party. Another representative example is Taiyuan Martyrs Memorial, which was built nearby as early as 1950 to commemorate the Nationalist soldiers killed during the Second Chinese Civil War (1945–50) and to remind people that the sublime morality of true martyrs was to fight against the sinful communists (Fan 2011, 337–60).

In developing the Yangmingshan area as a vital space to demonstrate its supreme authority over Taiwan, the ROC government attempted to restore the geographic layout of the mainland to the miniature Taipei City. The old Japanese street system, including indicators such as *machi* and *dori*, were removed, and most main roads and streets were renamed in reference to the KMT's doctrines, Confucian mottos, and the names of provinces and cities in mainland China. These words and terms with their symbolic meanings were interconnected within a conceptual network reflecting the postwar KMT's China-centric ideology and its assertion to regain sovereignty over the great China (*da zhonghua*) (Huang 2014, 79–105). One such example is Zhongshan North Road, renamed in memory of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, regarded as the father of the ROC, and which was originally called Chokushi kaidō during the Japanese colonial period, as the central axis avenue for saluting Japanese royal dignitaries. Identically, across this avenue are three east-west roads named *Minzu* (nationalism), *Minquan* (democracy), and *Minsheng* (welfare), which are Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles of the People (*Sanmin zhuyi*) and the cornerstone of the KMT. Other roads, such as Nanjing East/West Road, Beiping East/West Road, and Ren'ai (benevolence) Road, can also be interpreted as part of the KMT's

spatial reordering for realizing their objective of national restoration (Huang 1985, 220–22).

### **The Frontier of Asian Beauties: R&R Programs and the Eroticized Free China**

Eileen Chang's description of her accommodation in Taipei in "A Return to the Frontier" provides clues about the transformation of geopolitics in postwar Taipei, centering on the Yangmingshan area. Chang's strange feeling of staying in a Japanese-style inn in Yangmingshan implied that the phantom of Japanese colonialism continued to haunt postwar Taiwan, or Formosa, which had been under aggressive Japanese imperial rule for fifty years from 1895 to 1945. However, the name of her lodging, "General's Suite," subtly reflected the island's transformation into a military frontier under the control of the retreated KMT government after 1949. For Chang, her lodging experience in northern Taipei implicitly revealed that Yangmingshan, as the key administrative area in postwar Taiwan, experienced geopolitical transformation, manifesting the KMT's goal of transforming the island into an irreplaceable frontline and stronghold for retaking the Chinese mainland.

Notably, Chang related her lodging experience to the conjecture about erotic affairs between generals and their female companions (Chang 1963, 38): "It was plain that generals had feminine companionship while spending the night awaiting the Generalissimo. I wonder at the ease of procuring girls almost next door to that Christian and Confucian founder of the New Life Movement." Considering that Chang's motive to visit Taiwan involved collecting material for *The Young Marshal*, it is easy to relate her reference to "generals" and "feminine companionship" to Chang Hsüeh-liang's romance with Edith Chao (1912–2000), his lifelong mistress, as they are the protagonists of the novel. When Eileen Chang visited Taiwan in 1961, the couple were confined to their secluded residence in Beitou, and Taiwan was under the authoritarian rule of Chiang Kai-shek, who was "the Generalissimo" in Chang's account (Shai 2012; Taylor 2009). Intriguingly, Eileen Chang also mentioned activities of "procuring girls" close to her lodging, indirectly indicating that the morally questionable lady escort services existed in the area where the "Generalissimo" and his subordinate "generals" held their confidential meetings.

Through her suggestive narration, Chang's account of "generals," the "Generalissimo," and "feminine companionship" ironically reveal the fact that disgraceful sex transactions did exist in the ROC, underlying its firm

and upright image as the anti-Communist fortress that was rebuilt on the ideology of Confucian orthodoxy. In the following paragraph, Chang is candid in showing the prostitution advertisement that circulated in print media around the postwar island (Chang 1963, 38):

After I left Taipei for the countryside, I realized that prostitution was more open on this island than anywhere else in the world. In a small-town newspaper five or six advertisements of this type appeared in one day: "Joy and Happiness Prostitutes Domicile, 1<sup>st</sup> Class. 124 Shin Ming Road. Swarms of pretty girls like clouds, offering the best service."

Notwithstanding her slightly exaggerated description of Taiwan's openness to prostitution and the pervasive advertising in local newspapers, Eileen Chang unveiled the paradoxical condition of postwar Taiwan as the so-called Free China based on a self-proclaimed democratic system but contrary to the one-party dominated regime under the KMT's martial law (Walker 1959, 122–35; Chen 2008, 185–210). To control civil functions, martial law had been imposed in Taiwan under the KMT's command to consolidate national stability since 1948. The imposition enabled the regulation of people's activities and behaviors, primarily through prohibiting unlawful association and restricting freedom of speech, especially in relation to any suspicious contact with the enemy, communist China. This strict governance, coupled with the nationwide promotion of Confucian moral teachings, resulted in the outlawing of prostitution, but the sex trade persisted either covertly or on the margins of the law.

In 1950, one year after the ROC government's relocation to Taiwan, "The Administration Regulation of Special Escort" was issued, legitimizing the so-called special escort mistress, a euphemism for a prostitute (Moon 1997). Essentially, escort mistresses were assembled and settled in designated agency locations, from where they were hired and arranged to go on paid dates with clients in specific hotels. The legalization of escort services thereby boosted the prostitution and entertainment business in postwar Taipei, particularly in the district of Beitou, which had been well known for leisure pursuits during Japanese colonial Taiwan. The combination of the hot springs industry, erotic massage, and sex trade services earned the place the laudatory title "the tender land" (*wenrou xiang*) during the postwar period.

While Beitou became the most representative erotic district in postwar Taipei, the neighboring Yangmingshan area gradually evolved into the KMT's important political and administrative division integrated with American culture following the resumption of US aid to Taiwan as early as

the 1950s. During the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, the US proceeded to supply economic and military aid to the ROC in Taiwan and assigned the US Seventh Fleet to patrol the Taiwan Strait, providing the retreated ROC government with military assistance. A year later, with tension intensifying across the Taiwan Strait and the increasingly fierce global competition between the US and the Soviet Union, the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) was reestablished in Taipei. After the Sino-American Mutual Defense Treaty (SAMDY) was signed between the ROC and the US at the end of 1954 to formalize US military support to protect Taiwan, the United States Taiwan Defense Command (USTDC), the central headquarters in charge of US military aid operations to Taiwan, was established in the Yuanshan region of Taipei in 1955. Later, the compound of Headquarters Support Activity (HSA), a troop housing area comprising the east and west wings, was constructed, followed by the establishment of various facilities including the Taipei Navy Air Station, administration hall, enlisted men's club, health center, Navy Commissary and Exchange, and a theater and post office (Chan 2020, 9–28).

The systematic deployment of the USTDC in Taipei during the mid-1950s indicated that Taiwan was formally recognized as a frontier in the US-led regional scheme during the Cold War. From the perspective of US containment policy in the Asia-Pacific, Taiwan was strategically situated in the middle of the coast of East Asia and mainland Southeast Asia. It served as a crucial pivot point in the so-called island chain linking Okinawa—the largest US Air Force base in the Far East—and the Philippines, a former American colony. This positioning bestowed great geopolitical significance upon Taiwan. The significance was not only exemplified by Taiwan's participation in the trans-territorial and transnational network of US-led Pan-Asia security framework as the military frontier, but also in its irreplaceable role as the *de facto* frontier representing US-led capitalism versus mainland/communist China (Garver 1999). For the ROC government, being the frontier, however, cast the dilemma of maintaining sovereignty while balancing its inevitable dependence and economic interdependence with the US.

The paradoxical situation of Cold War Taiwan as Free China's frontier and the pro-American frontier is visible in Eileen Chang's account in "A Return to the Frontier." When she arrived at the Taipei airport, a Chinese-looking male stranger mistakes her for the former US Vice President Richard Nixon's (1913–1994) wife. Although Chang was amused, she did not think that the incident was entirely meaningless, understanding "Formosa's huge wave of wistful yearning for the outside world." Moreover, she added that "America" was "particularly" Taiwan's "only friend and therefore in some ways a foe"

(Chang 1963, 38), implying the contradictory situation of Taiwan as the isolated frontier under the coalition between the fragile, retreated Nationalist regime and its more vigorous and powerful American patron (Lin 2016, 1–13).

Furthermore, as Chang mentions in writing about the escort service in Beitou, the frontier status of Taiwan was not limited solely to military arrangements following the disposition of US forces on the island in the early 1950s; it was also linked to other derivative aspects of alliances and collaborations. Emerging transnational sex tourism between the US and its Asian allies was worthy of such attention. This phenomenon was primarily associated with the dominating US military involvement with Asian allies during the Cold War, resulting in the emergence and growth of the sex industry that targeted US troops in local communities. For instance, as Japan was occupied and chiefly administered by the US after 1945, there was a boom in prostitution services for the US army across Japan's major cities. The overwhelming expansion of sex industries impelled the postwar Japanese government to implement regulations on the sex business and related hygiene issues. With the outbreak of the Korean War, the US army garrisoned in Japan increased, thereby generating a substantial income through sex commerce. Apart from Japan, the immense growth of the sex industries near the US military bases located in South Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam during the Cold War correspondingly constituted a trans-territorial linkage between the erotic and military economy, divulging the secret profit derived from the martial cooperation between America and its Free World allies in Asia (Kovner 2012; Kramm 2017; Moon 1997; Boczar 2015, 187–220; Sturdevant and Stoltzfus 1993).

As for Taiwan, there were cases of prostitution in the US army after it was included in the US Asia-Pacific anticommunist pattern as early as the 1950s. However, it was not until the escalating entanglement in the Vietnam War (1954–75) and the initiation of the R&R program in the mid-1960s that Taiwan was officially enlisted as a US East Asian erotic frontier. As the name indicates, the R&R program was promoted by the US government with the aim of offering US soldiers rewards of rest and recuperation. As preferential treatment, the program was exclusively applied to US soldiers during the Vietnam War by offering them a five-day leave after spending a ninety-day period in Vietnam. Explicitly, its largest draw was the bonus of providing soldiers with free trips to popular cities in pro-American, liberal Asian countries. Servicemen on vacation could choose their recreational destination from the major capitals within the US Pacific defense line, namely Honolulu, Tokyo, Taipei, Hong Kong, Bangkok, Singapore, Manila, Penang, Kuala Lumpur, and Sydney. However, no matter how the US authority officially

beautified the legitimacy of the R&R program, emphasizing its cultural and humanistic value, US soldiers leaving the Vietnam War zone for their R&R vacation would usually seek pleasure by visiting local prostitutes, hiring escorts, or renting Asian girlfriends to satisfy their physiological and psychological needs. This ironic reality demonstrated that the R&R program was the US army's Far East sexual and dissipated trip.

Indeed, the R&R program was the direct outcome of the extended Vietnam War, which evinced the US intent to strengthen its military alliance with its Asian allies by broadening economic collaborations and integrating them into the war against communist expansion. As for Taiwan, along with the initiation of the R&R program in 1965, its status as the US frontier was elevated when the Ching Chuan Kang Air Base of Taichung developed into the largest transit and supply station for the US air force on the geopolitical map of the Vietnam War. Focusing on a closer military alliance with the anticipated economic gain through the R&R program, the ROC government actively undertook a series of arrangements to welcome soldier visitors. According to the official guidelines prepared during the mid-1960s for the reception of US military tourists (Evansco and Hodge 1968, 185–97; “Zhu yuenan meijun laitai xiujia” 1965–66, 18–19), the ROC government explicitly stated that the R&R program would accelerate and promote Taiwan's prosperity. With such positive expectations of foreign income to which the R&R program would contribute, the report particularly emphasized the reorganization of bars and hotels, as well as a reminder of sex hygiene. These factual measures therefore unveiled that the R&R program was the officially recognized and authorized sex tourism through mutual consent between the US and Taiwan governments (Chang 2019, 95–110).

Ironically, when the ROC government assumed that the R&R program would enhance Taiwan's economic status during the Cold War through multi-layered collaboration with the US, an article entitled “Recreation: Five-Day Bonanza” appeared in a 1967 issue of *Time* magazine, reporting the R&R program with tempting photographs (“Recreation: Five-Day Bonanza” 1967, 52–57), disclosing to readers worldwide that Taiwan, the frontier exalted as Free China standing for the Confucian values against the Communist evils, was an eroticized and decadent frontier to the American capitalist empire. Readers could easily understand that emphasis had been placed on expounding the value of US liberalism and capitalism related to the R&R program. The article's opening paragraph directly attributed the R&R project to the triumph of US capitalism, clearly indicating that “only the world's richest country could afford” such huge expenditure for its brave warriors.

Subsequently, the article eulogized the fairness and bonhomie manifested in the friendly interactions between colonels and all ranks of US soldiers on their relaxing flights to their anticipated recreational journey. By mentioning *From Here to Eternity*, the 1953 Hollywood film based on a novel by acclaimed author James Jones (1921–77), it accentuated the civilian rather than the military aspect of these recreations. The servicemen were portrayed as well-educated and curious about alien cultures, cutting across ethnicities and nations, as advocated by US democracy. Prior to the vacation, each soldier was “checked out for neatness” and “lectured on good behavior” and taught to be gentle, sophisticated, and well-behaved during the vacation (“Recreation,” 52). The image of the soldier that the US wished to present in the R&R program was not that of brutal and militant radicals like their communist opponents, but of benign protectors affectionately collaborating with their Asian allies to create and enjoy interracial harmony.

In contrast to the claimed positive image of the US as the global leader responsible for steering the world during the Cold War and unifying its allies, the subsequent photos in “Recreation” strikingly visualized the essence of the R&R program: the erotic trip organized for the US army’s Asian recreation supported by US capitalist power. Among the nine pictures, at least six revolve around the entertainment activities of US servicemen with their enchanting female Asian companions. The photograph taken in South Vietnam displays a seductive scene of a white marine holding hands with a bikini-clad girl by the beach, both laughing. The image does not convey any message relating Vietnam to the most “frustrating” battlefield during the Cold War (“Recreation,” 52). Similarly, the other two photos in Bangkok are about US soldiers having fun, lying in a water taxi, and savoring Thai cuisine in restaurants, both in intimate company with local girls. The Hong Kong photo showed US sailors dancing with their charming Asian mistresses, an incarnation of the desired fictionalized character Suzie Wong, wearing fashioned short cheongsams in the Wanchai district. The most explicitly erotic photograph was shot in Taipei, the capital of Free China, and showed a bathing scene in a hot sulfur spring hotel in Beitou, where a young US soldier is intoxicated and enjoying the massage and warm shower served by two nearly naked local escorts, with the text saying: “Taipei ... has gained R&R status from the complaisance of its girls and the excellence of its food” (“Recreation,” 52).

The erotic rhetoric of the Taipei photo evidently showcased the comfort, consolation, and humanity that the US government advocated to demonstrate democratic values and capitalist advantages. Conversely, it could also be considered a gendered metaphor for the American masculine conquest

of the feminized Asians. The naked and curvy Asian beauties in the photo are portrayed as sexualized exotic objects from the perspective of male US customers and masters. More intriguingly, the photo was shot in a sulfur hot spring hotel in Beitou, and the location would remind readers about Taiwan's subordination as the female other to its American master, akin to the petite incarnation of its former imperial Japanese lord now submitting himself to the tall dominant US empire.

More meaningfully, photos shot in Taipei and other Southeast Asian cities were juxtaposed with those shot in Japan and Australia. The contrast projected by different images reveals the US diplomatic hierarchy in its treatment of Asian allies. Compared with the visibly sensual scenes in the Taipei photo, the photos shot in Japan displayed cultural interactions and custom practices without erotic elements. One photo, taken in a resort at the foot of Mt. Fuji, on the front page of the appendix, shows two American soldiers wearing *yukata* in a traditional Japanese-style garden, experiencing a profound oriental atmosphere. The other is a racially harmonious image taken in Tokyo about a black US soldier who is tying *omikuji*, the fortune telling paper strip, to a temple tree in the presence of a local female student as interpreter. By showing cultural sympathy and mutual respect, the Japan photos vividly demonstrate that the US accorded political priority to its ally and showed voluntary involvement with its best valued Cold War ally in East Asia (Buckley 1992, 4–27; 99–114), and this political orientation was embedded in the message: “Japan is one of the great cultures of the Eastern world” (“Recreation,” 52). Similarly, the Australian photo was about a Western rancher’s family reunion. Their language and cultural similarities with Americans would undoubtedly attract US soldiers and motivate them to fight for their common interests, aiming to restore peace in the warring world. Moreover, the family-oriented narrative can be regarded as the promotion of a US-valued democracy.

Broadly, by highlighting the sensual enjoyment and interracial interaction between the US servicemen and Asian natives, the “Recreation” article serves as propaganda for the US strategy during the Cold War. In other words, the appeal of the R&R program was not merely a necessary supplement of the official military collaboration between the US and Asian allies. It further demonstrated that the prosperous US-led democracy and capitalism could aid its allies to emerge as liberal countries and avoid the impoverished and inhumane conditions of communism (Lair 2011, 107–44; Klein 2003, 19–60). As a result, US soldiers are portrayed in the photographs as “white knights” full of energy, good will, and fraternization (Marchetti 1993, 109–24), characteristics that could be grouped as the personified traits of an idealized Americanism.

Although the “Recreation” article encourages the ideology of Americanism and shows a positive attitude toward the R&R project, the accompanying Taipei photo aroused controversy about Taiwan as the frontier affiliated to its US protector. The photo containing the bathing scene contravened the official narrative of Taiwan’s position as an important military and political ally but conveyed an erotic message exposing the immorality that discredited the ROC’s legitimacy as the claimed Free China and adherent of Confucian orthodoxy. Moreover, the Taipei photo appeared as a symbolic analogy of the unequal relationship between Taiwan and the US: the female subordinate obediently submitting to her masculine master.

It is conceivable that after “Recreation” had been translated and reprinted in Taiwan newspapers, the erotic message of the Taipei photo provoked nationwide outrage over Taiwan’s national dignity. The local press interpreted the photo sarcastically, insinuating the decadent condition of Taiwan and prompting an official reaction from the ROC government. With police intervention, the Literary Inn (Wenshi Ge), the hotel where the photo was shot, was ordered to suspend business, and the mistress in the photo with her face shown was interrogated on the suspicion of endangering social decency (*fanghai fenghua*) (“Zhuyue meijun de xiuxi fuyuan jihua” 1967; “Yang zazhi lankan weixie zhaopian, peiyu nu hanxiu fating yingxun” 1968). Although the case was not prosecuted, one can imagine the public pressure and stigma the mistress faced during the investigation process. In contrast, the photographer and the US soldier in the photo did not receive any untoward attention from the public and distanced themselves from the notorious affair.

The unequal treatment of the local mistress and the US soldier reflected the fact that the status of US force in Taiwan had always been intricately involved in “extraterritorial jurisdiction,” which made handling of US-related cases considerably intractable (Chan 2020, 74–78; Craft 2015). To prevent a potential diplomatic crisis and suppress the inflammatory criticism triggered by the Taipei photo, the Taiwan government thereby announced a national guideline for rectifying social conduct (*gexin dangqian shehui fengqi zhidao gangling*). However, the official sanctions on the sex business were superficially reinforced and ineffective, since they failed to restrain the flourishing sex trade resulting from the complex interplay between the US demand for sustaining military forces and the incentive of substantial income generated by the R&R program for Taiwan (Kuo 2019, 43–45). Statistics show that even though the loan project from the US was terminated in 1965, Taiwan benefited considerably from the R&R project earnings. Approximately 20,000 soldiers chose Taiwan as their R&R destination between 1965 and

1966, and this number increased to 100,000 between 1967 and 1968. Within six years, from 1965 to 1971, an estimated 210,000 US military men visited Taipei through the R&R program, and the total foreign exchange earned from tourism exceeded USD 50 million (Chen 2018, 175, 196, 199).

### **Zhongshan North Road in Literary Representation: US Aid and Paradoxical Urbanization in Postwar Taipei**

Taiwan's voluntary participation in the R&R program as an eroticized frontier to the US patron caused a major dilemma to pursue a balance between national esteem and economic benefit under US capitalist power. Furthermore, in terms of the extent to which US influence had transformed Taiwan into a feminized island state, Taipei, the capital city, stood out as the most representative of the frontier, intricately tied to its American guardian. Overall, the political geography of postwar Taipei shaped by US aid and American culture can be classified into four representative areas. First, the Taipei airport, located in the Songshan district, played a significant role as a key military base for the ROC government in cooperation with the US Air Force. Second, the wide-ranging HSA compound, adjacent to the airport's westbound area in Yuanshan, oversaw general affairs regarding the US armed forces in Taiwan. Third, the northern part, stretching from the HSA compound and encompassing the Yangmingshan American Military Housing, along with associated infrastructure and facilities in Tianmu, housed the official residences of KMT dignitaries and allied American advisors (Chiu 2011, 34–45). Fourth, in comparison to Tianmu's affluent neighborhood and amenities for high-ranking US soldiers and their relatives, the southern area alongside Zhongshan North Road was an occidental community with hotels, import bookstores, bakeries, boutiques, and bars, more suitable for bachelors in the US military and R&R program visitors.

Zhongshan North Road, once the sacred route symbolizing the supremacy of Japanese imperialism, was transformed into a modern avenue after the 1950s to demonstrate that Taiwan was the embodiment of Free China as upheld by the KMT's nationalism and US-led internationalization. As the main road connecting the Grand Hotel and the Presidential Office Building in the central district, Zhongshan North Road was geopolitically reestablished as a national avenue in the mid-twentieth century. This urban artery was intentionally widened with greenery to display the advanced national image of postwar Taiwan and designed to be an officially Westernized area that symbolically characterized the representative landmark—the US

diplomatic mission—an exquisite white house in the Victorian architectural style. In addition, most consulates were set up along the road, and modern bank buildings, corporate headquarters, and deluxe hotels were built in succession as architectural complexes, extensively exhibiting Taiwan's progressive industrial development, economic growth, and rising status, all of which benefited from multiple collaborations with US aid.

During the day, Zhongshan North Road exemplified the masculine authority of the ROC government, aiming to represent itself as the orthodox Free China. Ironically, at night, the road transformed into a feminized territory filled with bars and bargirls, implying the feminization of Taipei's cityscape—a phenomenon analogous to the gendered nationalism of Taiwan under US patronage (Yin 2006, 112–17; Kuo 2019, 21–36). The bars were decorated in a Western style and provided American food and entertainment to attract male US customers. Apart from food service, the most notable feature of these bars was the presence of bargirls, in accordance with the stores' names exuding obvious exotic and Asian allure such as “Little Women,” “Peiping,” “Kowloon,” “Fox,” and “Pink” (“Shulinkou Air Station Taiwan”). In general, bargirls were in the public eye either stereotypical gold diggers with heavy makeup and tight short skirts, speaking rough English and living a debauched life, or dirty seducers and even demonized betrayers who traded their bodies to white-skinned clients and lacked morality and a sense of shame.

Bargirls emerged as an urban phenomenon during the 1960s and 1970s, inspiring several Taiwanese writers to use them as writing subjects. For these writers, bargirls, as symbolic objects representing the feminine others, were similar to Taiwan as the feminized frontier in relation to its masculine and powerful US conquerors. In addition, many writers also depicted Zhongshan North Road as a representative district within the Taipei cityscape, sketching Taiwan's local citizens' mindscapes as textured with fear, caution, desire, and confusion toward US aid culture and its capitalist power. In their writings, the nightclubs with young bargirls mushrooming along Zhongshan North Road formed an exclusively feminized cityscape, which not only metaphorically mirrored Taiwan's Cold War situation, resembling the enticing bodies of Asian beauties consumed by privileged US clients, but also reflected the rapid and uncontrollable urbanization that fueled economic development while corrupting the mind.

The first example is the 1977 short story entitled “Xu Wei in the Bar” (*Jiuba jian de xuwei*) by Tseng Hsin-yi (1948–). It draws on the generational tension between the male protagonist and his father, both involved in the bar business during the US aid era, alluding to Taiwan's struggle for nationhood

under US patronage. The story begins with Xu Wei's father, who joined the Nationalist army during the Second Sino-Japanese War and fled to Taiwan after 1949, initially working as a waiter in a hotel. The father then invested in bars on Zhongshan North Road when he noticed the sexual business opportunity resulting from the R&R program. After he is hospitalized in a serious car accident, his eldest son, Xu Wei, is compelled to take over his bar business. While taking over the bar, Xu is dismayed by the way bargirls trade their bodies and dignity in exchange for money. He is also disgusted with the bullying behavior of US army patrons. On several conflicting occasions, Xu is portrayed as a national paladin who dares to clash with the US army customers. The fiction ends with Xu's determination to leave the bar industry after beating up a domineering US soldier and features his strong conviction of getting his life back on track by regaining his dignity.

By describing Xu Wei's physical exertion and his quest for masculinity, the author utilizes gendered personification to foreground Xu's embarrassment as a metaphor for Cold War Taiwan striving for national sovereignty while being subordinated to the forceful US capitalist empire. Xu initially works as a carrier, a job with sufficient masculinity. After his father's car accident, Xu Wei is obliged to take control of the business as a sign of his filial piety, but he is agonized by the humiliation and the self-subordinate nature of his father's disgraceful profession as a bar manager or pimp. One scene describes Xu standing on Zhongshan North Road soliciting US serviceman passengers, and the shame, inferior status, and anguish he experiences in being deprived of manliness. For Xu, Zhongshan North Road was just like the exploited female body, which was the eroticized object in the US conquerors' lustful gaze, and the road symbolizes defeated manhood, or even the lost nationality of Cold War Taiwan. As the main setting in the story, Zhongshan North Road is significantly referred to as the gendered space that mirrors the subordinated and feminized situation of Cold War Taiwan to its all-powerful US ally.

Overall, in "Xu Wei in the Bar," Tseng Hsin-yi expresses her humanistic viewpoint by focusing on the male protagonist's external and internal struggle in urbanizing Taipei. Specifically, she is determined to expose the seamy side of the bustling Zhongshan North Road and convey her pessimistic attitude toward hyper urbanization resulting from overwhelming capitalism. When depicting Xu Wei quitting the bar business, there is an internal monologue with profound meaning: "Even though the bars of Taipei are closed, there are still countless brothels, dancing halls, wine houses and massage parlors ... It seems that the only way to cure society is to totally uproot sex establishments, but when will this be possible?" (Tseng 1995, 192).

The monologue thus unveils the author's quiet prediction of the present and future Taipei being engulfed in triumphant capitalism, highlighting her social concern as a voice in the wilderness.

Comparing the humanism revealed in the "Xu Wei in the Bar," the novella *Little Widows* (*Xiao guafu*) by Huang Chun-ming (1935–), the well-known writer of Taiwan nativist literature (Huang 2009, 147–264), was written as satire. This piece reconstructs the club as a broad symbolic field, revealing the economic networks, conflicting diplomatic relations, and political ecology between the US and its Asian allies during the Cold War (Chu 2011, 192). It narrates the story of a bar on Zhongshan North Road, intentionally named "Little Widows." Using the store's name, the bar manager calculatedly develops a set of marketing practices, training the hired bargirls to act as "little widows" through self-orientalization to arouse the desire for sexual transactions among R&R military customers. As a highly metaphorical term, "little widows" connotes the male manager's deliberate attempt to create an enticing scenario in which the bargirls, as the modern incarnation of the traditional Chinese widows, who were vulnerable and lonely, and are always eager for loving care and consolation from much healthier and stronger protectors, specifically referring to the US soldiers.

By describing the manager's manipulation of the "little widows," the novella not only satirizes the debatable "Chineseness" the Cold War ROC government leveraged to boost its national image, but also indirectly criticized the political complicity between the Nationalists' authoritarianism and the US-led capitalist hegemony. Both collaborated to form a chauvinist alliance in the R&R program, exploiting local Taiwanese females (Haddon 2000, 423–61). To underscore the commodification of bargirls through the implementation of the R&R program, Huang Chun-ming emphasizes the exposure of the complex commercial networks and scheming economic exchanges underlying the cooperative yet covetous relationship between Taiwan and the US (Shie 2013, 265–88). In addition to the sarcastic implication of the connotative "little widows," Huang also expresses his antiwar sentiment by depicting the feelings of love and warmth between the bargirls and US soldiers traumatized by the war. He further questions the excessive masculine war/sexual violence that not only contradicts the spirit of humanity, tolerance, and democracy advocated by the US, but also reflects the absurdity of power politics that the US twistedly claimed as justice (Shie 2009, 37–67).

Unlike the previous two pieces, which focus on male characters and their connection to Taiwan's self-imposed feminization and national crisis under US domination, Tseng Hsin-yi published another short story in the 1970s

entitled “The Woman in the Attic” (*gelou li de nuren*) (Tseng 1995, 211–26). In this piece, she adopts a first-person perspective of a bargirl to explore their real situation, making her narrative diverge from the stigmatization of bargirls in the public eye. The narrator rents a timeworn and cramped apartment in Taipei with other bar hostesses and becomes acquainted with Ai-na, another bargirl. Ai-na suffers from the pain of abortion. The narrator feels sympathetic toward her and recalls her hardships: several live-in relationships with American soldiers, a mixed-race son left by one of her US clients, and four abortions for one US army patron who dumps her. When Ai-na returns to work after an abortion, she is reportedly arrested for possession of LSD by a US army client. At the end of the story, the narrator visits the arrested Ai-na at the police station on Zhongshan North Road and feels deep sorrow upon seeing her face without makeup—pale and puffy, with a dazed and exhausted expression.

By converting the image of the madwoman in the attic into the local narrative of Cold War Taiwan, Tseng Hsin-yi replaces the conventional setting of a bustling nightclub with a dilapidated room as the locale where the true living conditions of a bargirl unfold. Ai-na’s bedridden and repulsive body displays a shady side underlying bargirls’ sensually desirable appearance, and her weary and consumed flesh manifests the powerlessness and worthlessness resulting from the exploitation of capitalism. As a spatial juxtaposition, the small room of the bargirls is allegorically set against the burgeoning streetscape of Zhongshan North Road. Even the police station, in the narrator’s eyes, represents nothing but a symbol of hypocritical social justice. The cityscape of tree-lined avenues, bright-lit cafés, and jewelry stores lining Zhongshan North Road only give the narrator “a shiver”: a flashy yet unrealistic illusion that neglects the struggles of the bargirls (Tseng 1995, 211–26).

While the untold hardships of bargirls is revealed in “The Woman in the Attic,” a 1977 novella called *Plucking Fern Song* (*Caiwei Ge*), written by the famous female writer Chu Tien-hsin (1958–) (Chu 2001, 134–51), offers a subtle account of an educated young lady’s tragic story of depravity as a bargirl. The heroine, Bei-bei, is initially an innocent university student studying in Tamsui, Taipei. One day, she meets Roger, a married white American official, in the suburb of Yangmingshan, and she quickly falls in love and devotes herself to the secret affair. When Roger returns to the US, Bei-bei receives an unexpected breakup letter. Depressed by this heartbreaking truth, Bei-bei becomes mentally ill and returns home to Pingtung to recover. Even after returning to Taipei, Bei-bei remains obsessed by the lovelorn pain. With no motivation to study, she finally drops out of college and

starts working as an “intern” bargirl after getting acquainted with Amy, a mature and coquettish bargirl. At the end of the story, Bei-bei is portrayed as a twenty-four-year-old woman who has worked as a bargirl for three years. The closing scene depicts Bei-bei putting on makeup at sunset by the window, sighing at her aging appearance and lost innocence.

From a feminist perspective, in *Plucking Fern Song* Chu Tien-hsin offers readers an atypical narrative of the bargirl. The image of Bei-bei differs from the fancy women described as exotic seducers in Western Cold War literature, or the less-educated and materialistic girls driven by pecuniary interests to strive for a better life in Taiwanese native literary narration. In contrast to these depersonalized images, Bei-bei is characterized as a sensitive and introverted girl who is self-conscious and who chooses to become a bargirl due to the vicissitudes of life. In terms of plot design, although the reason Bei-bei becomes a bargirl is her unfulfilled romance with Roger, the feminine affinity between her and Amy is depicted as a significant factor in Bei-bei’s decision to work in a bar. In Bei-bei’s eyes, Amy, the mature and socially adept bargirl, serves as a role model not only for achieving financial independence and emotional autonomy but also for embodying the attractive womanhood that Bei-bei had always sought within herself.

However, as a delicate and sensitive girl, Bei-bei eventually fails to find self-worth by modelling herself on Amy. For Bei-bei, Amy’s ostensible autonomy and independence, as she satisfies herself by spending extravagantly and enjoying vanities, is filled with illusions. Moreover, the cityscape of urbanizing Taipei is otherwise an external delusion projected by Bei-bei’s own doubt about self, desire, and dismay with the adult world. The description of her wanderings in northern Taipei can be interpreted as a topography of the city (Coverley 2006, 14; Ts’ai 2012, 219–39). The bright white house in Yangmingshan, where Bei-bei first meets Roger, symbolized the ideal home(land) and reflects the mindsets of Taiwanese who consider the US a dreamland of affluence, peace, and freedom. The Ching-kuang Market selling expensive imported goods on Zhongshan North Road materializes Bei-bei’s repressed yearning for worldly success. In comparison, Chen’s Cemetery, located in Shanzihou, Yanmingshan, where the couple dates secretly, implies their miserable love and serves as a spatial metaphor for Bei-bei’s subsequent self-decadence. When Beibei formally becomes a bargirl, the Keelung River running through northern Taipei seems to flow like her everlasting desire. At the end of the story, the urban night scenery with neon lights looks like an eerie phantom, swallowing up Bei-bei’s glamorous outfit on her way to work. The “black crystal palace,” a metaphorical reference to

Taipei's urbanizing cityscape, is also like a dark fairy tale trapping her in a vague reality.

Apart from the aforementioned narratives reflecting intellectual writers' concerns about Cold War Taiwan from moral, social, and female perspectives, popular songs that circulated during the mid-twentieth century in Taiwan also considered Zhongshan North Road as the main theme to represent the historical memory and collective imagination triggered by Taipei's urbanizing cityscape. One early song is titled "Walking Seven Times down Zhongshan North Road" (*Zhongshanbeilu zou qi bai*). With a Taiwanese local ditty style tune, the song's lyrics provide a first-person account of a lady recalling and regretting her past love for a man. By recollecting the memory of walking intimately with her lover on Zhongshan North Road, the female narrator mourns her futile romance stopped by parental intervention and social pressure.

With the female expression, Zhongshan North Road in the song is not only the exact place with material attractions of Taipei's rising urban culture to the city's newcomers, but also a symbolic site that introduces a new affectional pattern and emotional experience to modern women in their pursuit of love. The other lyrical song, "How Much Tenderness, How Many Tears" (*Duoshao rouqing duoshao lei*), was adapted from a 1965 song by one of the best-known American pop singers, Elvis Presley (1935–77) titled "Summer Kisses Winter Tears." The track was translated into Mandarin Chinese and widely broadcast during the mid-1960s and 1970s, marking a period when Cold War Taiwan embraced American entertainment culture. The translated song continues with the original tender melody, and its lyrics reproduce the melancholic lament for a transient love. The song hints at the illusory nature of a romance without a future, resonating with the liaison of bargirls with US military patrons. This resonance contributed to its popularity, leading to performances by bargirls.

For all the literary tales or imaginings about bargirls and their amorous entanglements with the stationed US soldiers, the social aspect concerning Amerasian orphans was much more urgent, serious, and a lasting problem left by US influence on its Asian allies. During the Cold War, Asian mothers with anonymous or unknown American fathers gave birth to children of mixed races. Before *Miss Saigon*, the 1989 Broadway musical that romanticized the tragic love affair between an Asian bargirl and a US soldier, the issue of Amerasian orphans was embedded in the main narrative of Cold War Taiwanese literature. In effect, these orphans suffered from the underprivileged condition of being the children of single parents and endured lifelong social discrimination and racial stigma without knowledge

of their other parent's origin (Chen 2018, 92–102). Ironically, on the US side, addressing the problem of Amerasian orphans was taken as an opportunity to propagate US advocacy of interracial integration. The representative institution was the Pearl S. Buck Foundation that was dedicated to promoting the adoption of Asian orphans from World War II by American middle-class families and sponsoring mixed-race orphans and single-parent families left behind by the US military during the Cold War. Through transnational social assistance to war orphans, the Pearl S. Buck Foundation not only helped burnish the public image of the US but also advocated the goal of creating a global order of world unity in accordance with the US government. This involved emphasizing family values and inclusive love, in contrast to the dehumanized class conflicts in chaotic Communist countries (Klein 2003, 143–46).

The phenomenon of Amerasian orphans is comparable to the isolated situation in Cold War Taiwan. In other words, fatherless Amerasian orphans, distanced from normality and seeking identification, metaphorically foreshadowed the fate of Taiwan—the fragile frontier under US protection but always at the risk of being abandoned. In 1971, following the visit of US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger (1923–2023) to the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the initiation of Sino-American rapprochement, the ROC government was expelled from the United Nations during the same year. The following year, President Richard Nixon visited China and signed the Shanghai Communiqué, marking America's disinclination to intervene in the sovereignty issue between the PRC and the ROC. This led to the subsequent large-scale withdrawal of the US military from Taiwan by the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. In 1979, the US formally broke off diplomatic relations with Taiwan, and Taiwan was no longer, *de jure*, the indispensable Cold War frontier for the US against its Communist opponents.

Like an abandoned orphan, Taiwan has become an outlying island, leaving behind its past as the frontier solely dependent on the US, and has been striving to redefine its existence as a new frontier by actively engaging itself in challenging international affairs. Zhongshan North Road, which once epitomized the achievements of Cold War Taiwan's modernization supported by US aid, has been revitalized into a renewed cityscape due to the influx of Japanese tourists. Since the late 1970s, with growing commercial contact with Japan, Americanized clubs and bars have declined on Zhongshan North Road and were replaced by Japanese-style eateries, *izakaya*, and hotels mainly serving Japanese businessmen and tourists. The trendy language of bargirls on the road has changed from English to Japanese. Even Beitou, an

area well known for its hot spring resorts during the colonial period, was revived to become a nostalgic and ever-improving pleasurable target place for new Japanese visitors. Yangmingshan, a military-restricted area that once symbolized the ROC's one-party authoritarian rule, was gradually opened to the public as a national park and historic landmark after the lifting of martial law in the 1980s. The changing cityscape of northern Taipei has displayed Taiwan's situation as an evolving frontier with its modern and democratic progress in the post-Cold War era.

## Conclusion

Although Eileen Chang's account of Taiwan in "A Return to the Frontier" is concise, the essay considers her Asian trip, written during the early 1960s, as an inspiring source to investigate the frontier, a term Chang uses to describe Cold War Taiwan. It is a key concept to explore the complex historical background and political context that made Taiwan a representative Far Eastern frontier in the mid-twentieth century. Chang's description of her accommodation in northern Taipei was an unusual experience replete with quaint feelings about the Japanese-style surroundings and her conjectures about erotic affairs between generals and their female companions. In her observation, postwar Taipei and Taiwan Island were an isolated frontier, haunted by the Japanese colonial legacy and struggling to revive under the domineering control of the KMT government in retreat and the overwhelming influence of US aid.

This frontier, as depicted in Eileen Chang's prose and obscured by the political upheavals of the mid-twentieth century, underwent significant reconstruction, resulting in a geographically transformed postwar Taipei cityscape. As the central administrative and military region exclusively for KMT's governance, northern Taipei, extending from Yangmingshan, was rebuilt to showcase the authority of Free China claimed by the postwar ROC government and its ideological belief in recapturing mainland China. Traditional Confucian teachings and nationalism were integrated into public architecture and the layout of Taipei City, grouped as visual representations of the cultural orthodoxy that Free China possessed against the PRC.

While advocated as the anti-Communist frontline with its claimed Confucian orthodoxy and nationalist legitimacy, Taiwan ironically became the erotic frontier of its commanding ally under the US aid policy. With the implementation of the R&R program, the US incorporated Taiwan into its

Cold War order through a transnational sex economy, particularly in the context of the Vietnam War. The fact that Taiwan became a destination for sex tourism for the US army not only countered the KMT's claim of Free China based on patriarchal morality and anti-Communist overtones but also highlighted the paradoxical situation of Taipei's urbanization confronted with the embarrassing thrive of the sex industry along Zhongshan North Road. According to Taiwanese novelists, this representative avenue was portrayed as a feminized cityscape that evoked public anxiety about the Cold War and Taiwan's dilemma of maintaining its sovereignty while balancing its inevitable dependence and interdependence with US hegemony. This reflects Taiwan's struggle with tempting but dangerous modernization. The Amerasian orphans, mentioned in some of these narratives, were another symbolic metaphor for Taiwan's fate as the fragile and risky frontier of US hegemony during the Cold War.

In the early 1980s, Eileen Chang rewrote in Chinese her 1961 trip to Asia. The unpublished script was titled "Chongfang Biancheng" (Revisiting the border towns) (Chang 2008, 961). While the original English version referred to Taiwan as the isolated frontier seeking its way out of the tricky and complex global Cold War battlefield, the Chinese version overwrites the earlier text by delineating Taiwan as a virgin land with its scenic landscapes, local customs, and folk art that awakened Chang's nostalgia for the homeland. This essay, thus, focuses on Chang's original English version "A Return to the Frontier" published in the 1960s, and examines Cold War Taipei as a place where Japanese colonial influence, Nationalist ethical enforcement, and America domination converged. The ebb and flow of mid-twentieth century Taipei embodies the losses and gains of Taiwan as the frontier during the US-led Cold War period. The old frontier has gradually waned, but contemporary Taiwan, attributable to its geographical and political existence, will become more involved in the ever-changing world and develop its new frontier in the future.

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## 4. The City through the Lens: Cold War Taipei in Bai Jingrui's Films, 1960–80

*Mei-Hsuan Chiang*

**Abstract:** In this essay, I examine the representation of Taipei in Taiwan cinema during the Cold War, with a specific focus on Bai Jingrui's films from the 1960s to the 1970s. As a prominent filmmaker in Taiwan, Bai Jingrui is known for his stylistic innovation and the urban theme in his films. Building on Henri Lefebvre's discussion on the production of space, I examine the KMT government's representations of space and the representational spaces in Bai Jingrui's movies that captured people's lived experience during this period. I look at Taipei as a contested space for political and cinematic representations and investigate the ways in which Bai Jingrui negotiated his representation of the city and the KMT government's nation-building project that glorified Taipei as a symbol of modernity, progress, and home.

**Keywords:** Bai Jingrui, Taipei, Cold War, healthy realism, Taiwan cinema

### Introduction

After Japan's defeat in World War II, the Nationalist Party (KMT) assumed control of Taiwan and established Taipei as a provincial city. A few years later, in 1949, the KMT government led by Chiang Kai-shek was forced to retreat to Taiwan after its defeat on the mainland by the Communist Party. During the Cold War, Taiwan became the KMT's base for reclaiming the lost mainland. With the city of Taipei, the new (temporary) capital of the Chinese Republic quickly expanding and its population growing exponentially in the 1960s with the new mainland émigrés, the Executive Yuan of Taiwan approved making Taipei a centrally administered municipality in 1966. Taipei developed quickly with the incorporation of several neighboring

districts, including Shilin and Neihu, and its population continued to grow, exceeding two million by the mid-1970s. By the late 1960s, Taipei was one of the most important cities in East Asia, greatly impacting commerce, finance, technology, art, and media.

As Taipei grew, it also became a captivating subject for films in the late 1960s. The Chinese-language film industry in Taiwan began to flourish in the mid-1960s; in 1964, Taiwan's state-owned film company, the Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMPC), introduced healthy realism (*jiankang xieshi zhuyi*) to the local film industry. To counter communist propaganda, the CMPC tried to promote moral values and to present a sanitized version of the country in these healthy realist films. While early healthy realist films often featured idyllic scenes of the countryside and included virtuous characters living in rural areas, in the late 1960s they shifted to popular genres, such as urban comedies and romantic melodramas. Bai Jingrui was a prominent filmmaker from the late 1960s to the 1970s who took a unique career path. Unlike his contemporaries who focused on stories set in the countryside, he explored and interpreted various aspects of the urban experience. As the first Taiwanese to receive a film degree from the prestigious Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome, Italy, Bai Jingrui was ambitious in bringing innovative filmmaking and cinematic realism to Taiwan. Contrary to state-prescribed aesthetics and ideology, Bai Jingrui's early films often documented the city and explored localized urban identity. His realist approach to the urban lifestyle sometimes meant capturing the dark and pessimistic side of Taiwanese society; he was often forced to modify his representation of the city to fit into the dominant narrative of healthy realism.

This essay investigates the ways in which Bai Jingrui negotiated his representation of the city within the KMT government's nation-building project, which glorified Taipei as a symbol of modernity, progress, and anticommunist. Beginning in the 1950s, the KMT government was desperate to reconstruct and establish new meanings for Taipei, and Taiwan cinema played a crucial role in this process of reflecting, interpreting, and reconfiguring the city as well as the urban lifestyle. To examine the KMT government's reterritorialization and reconstruction of Taipei during the postwar era, it is helpful to consider Henri Lefebvre's threefold view of space and the entangled relationships between the physical, ideological, and cinematic production of the city during the Cold War. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre maintains that space is a social product and calls for a shift from the study of "things in space" to the "production of space." He proposes to examine social space in three ways: through spatial practice,

representations of space, and representational spaces. He explains that “spatial practice” is space as perceived. It is the spatial articulation of civic control; more specifically, it is “observed, described, and analyzed on a wide range of levels: in architecture, in city planning or ‘urbanism,’ in the actual design of routes and localities, in the organization of everyday life, and, naturally in urban reality” (Lefebvre 1991, 413–14). The representation of space, or space as it is conceived, is the dominant form of space in everyday society. It is how space is conceptualized and conceived—the space of scientists, urban planners, and social engineers, amongst others. Representational spaces are passively experienced by “inhabitants” and “users.” This is also the space that the imagination seeks to change and appropriate (Lefebvre 1991, 38–39).

Building on Lefebvre’s argument, I analyze the production of space—particularly representations of space and representational spaces—in Cold War Taipei through Bai Jingrui’s films from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, with a specific focus on his first narrative film *Lonely Seventeen* (1967), and his well-known urban comedy *Accidental Trio* (1969). I look at Taiwan cinema’s participation in the production of space during the 1960s. On the one hand, the KMT government’s representations of space and the reterritorialization of Taipei established a new intellectual, social, and political order during the Cold War. On the other hand, Bai Jingrui’s films also served as representational spaces that captured the people’s lived experience during this period. In the Cold War context, Taipei is a contested space for political and cinematic representations, as is illustrated in Bai Jingrui’s struggle to balance the government’s political demands and his own artistic style, and in the complex relationship between the representations of space and the representational spaces in Bai Jingrui’s movies.

### **Real City and Reel City: The Production of Space in the Cold War Context**

As Colin McArthur (1997, 20) has argued, cities are “always already social and ideological, immersed in narrative, constantly moving chess pieces in the game of defining and redefining utopias and dystopias. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that cities in discourse have no absolute and fixed meaning, only a temporary, positional one.” Taipei, a city that has had a prominent role in the course of East Asian history, has been produced and reproduced by different groups of settlers and colonizers. Following WWII and Chiang Kai-shek’s army’s retreat from the mainland

in 1949, Taipei experienced rapid expansion due to an influx of mainland émigrés, compelling the newly arrived KMT government to restructure the city's space. Right after Japan's defeat in WWII, the KMT government took over Taiwan and started to eradicate Japanese influence on the island. In 1945, they replaced the Japanese system of *ding*, which divided the city into neighborhoods, to formally name Taipei's streets. In fact, the street names in Taipei are mostly the names of famous cities and places on the mainland, such as Nanjing East Road, Chongqing South Road, and Kinmen Street. By transplanting these markers of mainland geography to Taipei, the government intended not only to help newly arrived mainland émigrés orient themselves on the island but also to declare its determination to return to the mainland in the future. In fact, with émigrés from the mainland and people who moved from other parts of Taiwan, the population in Taipei increased drastically from 270,000 in 1946 to 560,000 in 1951. Reflecting the urgent need for housing, some people occupied dormitories or houses left by the Japanese; others lived in shanty towns. The housing problem grew critical in Taipei during the postwar years. Nevertheless, the KMT government was eager to reclaim the mainland immediately after its withdrawal to Taiwan, so it made national defense its top priority. It was not until the 1950s that the KMT government finally recognized Taipei's disorganized cityscape and started a process of urban planning.

Threatened by the expansion of communism throughout Asia, and particularly by the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, the United States and its East Asian allies began their anticommunist war in the region. In 1954, the KMT government signed the Sino-American Mutual Defense Treaty with the US. The treaty sought to defend Taiwan from potential PRC invasion by providing the KMT government with both military and financial assistance to achieve this goal. The KMT government used a large part of the aid to improve the island's infrastructure, including the construction of highways and dams, and to carry out land reforms and modernize the countryside. With knowledge and technical support from the US, in 1955 the mayor of Taipei, Gao Yushu, tried to build Taipei into a modern and Westernized city. After his team's onsite investigation of twelve European and US cities, Gao Yushu concluded that, to solve Taipei's urgent housing problems, the city needed more apartment-style buildings. The city government decided to follow the lead of US urban planners and designed a community near Songshan Airport (on the south side of Minsheng East Road) for middle-class families, and partially subsidized walk-up apartments mostly for the working-class population (Lin and Gao 2015, 55). In addition to providing financial aid,

the treaty also allowed US technocrats to come to Taiwan and contribute to policy development. Supported by the US and the United Nations, Taiwan established the Urban and Housing Development Committee in 1966, which lasted until 1971 when Taiwan was expelled from the United Nations.

In fact, a significant part of the urban-renewal plan in Taipei in the 1960s was drawn from the US's Housing Act of 1954. With US support and influence, Taiwan's housing and urban-renewal plans during the time not only promoted Western-centered discourses on modernity, but they also reflected the capitalist values of the US-dominated economic system. More specifically, in the mid-1950s, the Eisenhower administration launched the "people's capitalism" propaganda campaign to promote the US economic system, capitalist values, and social and technological modernization to present the country and its Cold War allies as prosperous nations in contrast to their communist enemies. At the same time, the US encouraged the KMT government to tone down its anticommunist campaign and focus instead on promoting Taiwan's social progress. The focus on Taiwan's social progress resonated in the Taiwan film industry's enthusiasm to showcase the country's modernization from the mid-1960s to the 1970s. For instance, during the 1960s Taiwan Film Culture Co., a state-owned film company known for producing news reels, incorporated global news supplied by the United States Information Agency (USIA). However, from 1965 onward, the company redirected its attention toward documenting Taiwan's construction and modernization efforts.

In fact, the KMT government began to value cinema as a vehicle for political mobilization and decided to improve the local film industry with help from the US and Japan in the 1950s. As Lin Tsan-Ting, an important cinematographer associated with the CMPC, recalls, the equipment owned by the CMPC was extremely outdated, and it was with US aid that the company was finally able to purchase the newer model of camera in 1955 (Lin 2016, 6). Additionally, US aid allowed the CMPC to send its cinematographers and other film technicians to study filmmaking, lighting, and sound recording abroad. The CMPC, utilizing its newly acquired color-printing technology, directed its focus toward capturing the rural landscape. In contrast to the Taiwanese dialect melodramas of the 1960s produced by privately owned companies, which reinforced the enduring urban-rural dichotomy, the CMPC's healthy realist films embraced a romantic pastoral tradition.

The general manager of the CMPC, Gong Hong, claimed that it was Li Xing's *Our Neighbors* (1963) that inspired the conception of healthy realism. Gong Hong approved of *Our Neighbors*' humanistic approach to common people's lives, but he opposed the film's realist representation of Taipei, which

he considered cluttered and shabby. As he later explained, “‘healthy’ means ‘indoctrination,’ and ‘realism’ means ‘countryside’” (Liao 1994, 42). As a result, the celebration of small towns and their values became a consistent theme in healthy realist films in the 1960s, such as Li Xing and Li Jia’s *Oyster Girl* (1964) and Li Xing’s *Beautiful Duckling* (1965).<sup>1</sup> The sanitized version of the country presented in healthy realist films also served as a tool to promote state-prescribed values and counter communist propaganda. Nevertheless, as Hong Guo-Juin has argued, an unstoppable modernization process began to change the countryside of Taiwan in the late 1960s: “In short, the *stasis* of realist aesthetics in the service of the Nationalist ideology of unchanging values and unified nationhood would eventually become incompatible with the inevitable *change* demanded by the rising pressure of nation-building by modernization. Healthy realism is finally this dynamic, paradoxical *stasis of change*” (Hong 2011, 77). With Taiwanese society’s rapid industrialization and urbanization in the late 1960s, the CMPC was forced to shift its focus to the city, bringing Cold War ideological warfare to urban space.

Beginning in the late 1960s, the CMPC began to use Taipei as a stage to display Taiwan’s economic power and to assert the KMT government’s political legitimacy during the Cold War. To do so, the films often emphasize what Lefebvre conceptualized as conceived space: the government’s postwar city planning and its modern construction of the city. For Lefebvre, conceived space is formed through knowledge, signs, and codes, shaped by the discourse of specialists who aim to valorize, quantify, and administer space. In other words, it refers to how our knowledge, which is “a mixture of understanding and ideology,” shapes how we comprehend space (Lefebvre 1991, 41). Also, to attract younger audiences to the cinema in the late 1960s, the CMPC began to incorporate within healthy realism other genres with an urban setting, such as romantic melodramas, comedies, and musicals. In particular, the “three rooms” (*san ting*) included in romantic melodrama films adapted from Qiong Yao’s romance novels—the living room (*ke ting*), the dance hall (*wu ting*), and the café (*kafei ting*)—show that the urban milieu had become a site of romance, excitement, and enjoyment.<sup>2</sup> Taipei was often depicted as modern, progressive, and cosmopolitan; slums, unpaved roads, and other “unclean” and “unethical” places are nowhere to be found in these films.

1 Other filmmakers not affiliated with the CMPC also followed the trend of healthy realist filmmaking. For example, Yang Wen-gang made *Call of the Mountain* (1967) and *Spring in a Small Town* (1969) for the Taiwan Film Studio, one of the three major state-owned film companies during the 1960s.

2 Sometimes, a restaurant (*can ting*) is also counted as one of the “three rooms.”

## Taipei, a Contested Space for Representation in Bai Jingrui's Early Films

The second half of the 1960s and the early 1970s marked a troubled period for Bai Jingrui's relationship with the film censors and CMPC authorities in Taiwan. His realist approach to representing the city in his early films and ambivalent attitude toward the Cold War discourse on modernity often deviated from the ideal urban and national image upheld by the KMT government. His films did not reflect conceived spaces and follow the dominant narrative to glorify the city's modernization. Instead, they were interested in representational spaces, actively investigating the effect of the urban lifestyle on city dwellers and their lived experience.

After graduating from the National Taiwan Normal University, Bai Jingrui worked as a reporter for the *Independent Evening Post* and served as a film-review contributor to the *United Daily News*. Inspired by Italian neorealist films, he decided to quit his job in Taiwan to follow his passion and pursue a degree at the famous Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia.<sup>3</sup> During his two years in Italy, he was exposed to European modernist films by Federico Fellini, Michelangelo Antonioni, and Robert Bresson, amongst others, and had the opportunity to attend numerous lectures by several Italian film masters (Jian 2010). Upon his return to Taiwan in 1963, he was recruited by CMPC manager Gong Hong to join the company. At the time, he was eager to put into practice what he had learned in Italy, and he made his first film, *A Morning in Taipei*, in 1964.

*A Morning in Taipei* was not released after it was produced because, as a city symphony film, it deviated from healthy realism's focus on anti-urban, pro-small-town ideology. The CMPC also took issue with the film's realist aesthetics that exposed the not-so-glamorous side of Taipei. The city had only begun its urban-planning project and was still filled with overcrowded low-income neighborhoods—it was not as stylish as the CMPC would have hoped (Huang 2001, 24–25). Although the film captured a newly constructed middle-class neighborhood, it also juxtaposed it with other places, such as the traditional marketplace. By comparing the script and the definitive version of the film, critic Lin Yingzhi discovered that some of the “unhealthy” elements had also been removed, including a scene set in a slaughterhouse (Lin 2006, 52). Although Bai Jingrui revised the film to meet the government's requirements, the censor still disagreed with the film's experimental style

3 He worked as a journalist and studied painting and stage design in Rome before he was accepted by the famous Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia.

and was upset with its realist representation of Taipei. In the end, *A Morning in Taipei* was abandoned in the CMPC's warehouse until it was rediscovered at the National Film Archive in Taiwan in 2008.

In fact, the tension between Bai Jingrui's realist aesthetics and the government's ideological demands during the Cold War can be seen throughout his early career in Taiwan. He constantly shifted between realist filmmaking and propagandist narrative and had to compromise his realist aesthetics in order to highlight government-approved values in the first few years after he joined the CMPC. After his ambitious attempt making *A Morning in Taipei*, the CMPC assigned him to direct a period drama, *Fire Bulls* (1965), with Li Xing and Li Jia. Later, when Bai Jingrui finally had the opportunity to direct his first narrative film, *Lonely Seventeen*, the film's critique of the impact of the rigid education system and the alienation inherent in modern city life on Taiwanese young adults once again caught the authorities' attention, forcing him to modify the entire story. *Lonely Seventeen* centers on a middle-class high school student, Dan-mei, who has secretly admired her sister's fiancé, Feng-ze, without knowing that Feng-ze is having a clandestine affair with another woman behind her sister's back. One day, when Dan-mei is not invited to a family gathering celebrating her sister's engagement, she pressures Feng-ze to leave the party and pay her a visit despite the stormy weather. On his way to see Dan-mei, Feng-ze stops by his mistress's place and is injured during a fight. He continues driving despite a serious wound on his forehead, and this eventually leads to an accident that kills him. Dan-mei and the mistress are traumatized by Feng-ze's death, each holding herself responsible for the accident.

Unlike the rhythmic editing in *A Morning in Taipei*, *Lonely Seventeen* uses longer takes and tracking shots to examine Taipei. From the beginning of the film, the camera shows great interest in the cityscape to the point that the images of the city sometimes threaten to overwhelm the story itself. The film follows Dan-mei closely to explore different parts of the city; the opening credit sequence, for example, shows Dan-mei walking home from school; then, the camera moves away from Dan-mei and cuts to a train rumbling across the bridge, followed by a montage of the city's neon lights and street scenes. In the sequence, Taipei is treated like an object that is as fascinating as the narrative that follows, and, in fact, footage like this is common in several of Bai Jingrui's urban films from this period. In line with Bai Jingrui's realist tendency in his early films, most of the movie was shot on location, including places like Jingmei Girls' High School, the Ambassador Hotel, and Taipei Children's Amusement Park, to name but a few. He was also interested in modern, stylish settings, such as cafés, bars, and restaurants,

and his international experience is reflected in his cosmopolitan depiction of the city, as illustrated in the scene in the Ambassador Hotel where the lobby is filled with foreigners, and the sequence even ends with an Italian couple arguing with the hotel receptionist.

Echoing his other works from that period, *Lonely Seventeen* vividly exemplifies space production according to Lefebvre's framework, depicting the dynamic interplay among perceived, conceived, and lived spaces. *Lonely Seventeen* does not solely reflect the KMT government's postwar urban renewal project promoting Cold War modernity; it also delves into the characters' lived experiences within that context. More importantly, Bai Jingrui further employs urban imagery to present his critique of Taiwan's social transformation and rapid modernization during the 1960s.

After the death of Feng-ze, Dan-mei's disoriented mental state is vividly portrayed through her aimless wandering in the city. Eventually, she finds herself near a bustling railroad crossing near Zhonghua Road, the vibrant shopping nucleus of 1960s and 1970s eastern Taipei. Originally a settlement for mainland Chinese immigrants in 1949, Zhonghua Road housed bamboo shelters. However, the escalating population density prompted Chiang Kai-shek's vision to modernize it as a symbol for the nation. In 1959, he mandated the Taiwan Garrison Command to oversee its renovation (Shih 2008, 40). The construction of China Plaza and the urban renewal project along Zhonghua Road commenced in 1960 and concluded on 22 April 1961. The subsequent surge of theaters, department stores, and restaurants in the China Plaza vicinity epitomized Taipei's essence, intricately linked to its adjacency to the Taipei Main Station.

In the scene, a passerby intervenes as Dan-mei approaches the tracks while a train is incoming. The camera swiftly captures the approaching train, highlighting the prominent China Plaza in the background. In this scene, Dan-mei disregards the man's warning and continues walking in traffic as the camera gradually zooms out, showing a panoramic view of the prosperous shopping district. Under the camera's gaze, Dan-mei is disoriented and seems lost in the hustle and bustle of the city. In his analysis of Baudelaire's works, Walter Benjamin (1968, 165) points out that the inhabitants of the modern city have trained their consciousness to always be alert to the overstimulating environment, forming a protective shield against the metropolitan masses. Nevertheless, Dan-mei becomes unable to respond to the external stimuli as her protective shield no longer works. While Dan-mei's mental and emotional state is a result of her traumatic experience, her wandering also captures the representational space that Lefebvre discusses, a combination of sensory perceptions and lived

experiences. In *Lonely Seventeen*, the street scenes also allow Bai Jingrui's characters to come to terms with Taiwan's experience of modernity during the Cold War era.

In addition to probing the psychology of city dwellers, these scenes also enabled Bai Jingrui to articulate his critique of the urban middle class. In the scene where a melancholic Dan-mei wanders in the city and walks along the riverbank, the camera gradually moves away from her to follow two small children passing by. Then, the camera shifts its attention to an advertisement for cram school on the wall. In the scene, the camera moves autonomously to show what really concerns the director: the influence of Taiwan's education system and the rigid urban middle-class family structure. Originally, Bai Jingrui wanted to focus on the impact that the education system and the alienation inherent in modern city life had on Taiwanese young adults, but as film critic Huang Jen recalls, the CMPC was worried that the film's negative portrayal of Taiwan and Taiwanese youth would be appropriated by the communist enemy and used against the KMT (Huang 2001, 41). As a result, Bai Jingrui had to revise the story, adding the part where Dan-mei goes through psychotherapy and fully recovers at a mental health institute, which is a rare setting for Taiwan cinema in the 1960s. In fact, Bai Jingrui presented the hospital as both a medical and moral disciplinary institution. At the end of the film, the doctor tells Dan-mei and Feng-ze's mistress that neither of them is responsible for the death of the man, as he concludes: "The death of Feng-ze can only be attributed to his own irresponsible attitude toward relationships." In other words, the ultimate cure for Dan-mei is not scientific treatment but moral indoctrination that is in line with the value system endorsed by the government.

In the end, *Lonely Seventeen* redeems itself in the eyes of the censors from its realist representation of Taipei and its critique of Taiwan's modernization with scenes of the natural landscape. After Dan-mei abruptly recovered from her illness, she returns to school and is greeted by all her classmates. Her classmates invite her to join the ski camp organized by the China Youth Corps, formerly known as the China Youth Anti-Communist National Salvation Corps, and intricately linked to the KMT government since its establishment in 1952. The film then quickly cuts to Hehuan Mountain, where Dan-mei and her classmates ski, with a high-spirited propagandistic song playing in the background. The change of setting from the city to nature echoes the glorification of the countryside in healthy realism, underscoring the government-supported ideology.

Starting with his earliest films in Taiwan, Bai Jingrui showed great interest in the city. Challenging the government's nation-building project,

he continuously questioned and investigated the KMT's construction of Taipei and the Cold War discourse on modernity through his realist style and aesthetics. In 1969, Bai Jingrui joined Li Xing's film company, Ta Chung Motion Picture Co., and he began to have more freedom to choose his film topics when he worked with Ta Chung and other privately owned companies. By this time, he had strategically adjusted his approach to represent and critique the city and the urban middle class, aiming to circumvent potential censorship challenges.

### Home Matters: Reflections on Urban Space and Modern Life

Moving away from realist filmmaking, which constantly upset the conservative CMPC authorities during the 1960s, Bai Jingrui turned to more lighthearted urban comedies and dramas in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. During this period, he made several popular films, including *The Bride and I* (1969), *Accidental Trio*, and *Home Sweet Home* (1970), which adopted a more playful style to discuss the consequences of modern urbanization. He also portrayed the urban middle class in a positive and humorous way, upholding government-supported traditional family values and nationalist ideology. Bai Jingrui made *The Bride and I* for CMPC after his unsuccessful experience with *Lonely Seventeen*. He employed various state-of-the-art and modernist techniques to craft this lighthearted romantic comedy, and it turned out to be a great hit. The success of *The Bride and I* (1969) prompted the CMPC to propose a sequel titled *The Wife and I*, but Bai Jingrui was strongly opposed to this idea and wanted to start a new project (Chang 2012, 261). In fact, he had agreed to make the urban comedy *Accidental Trio* for the Ta Chung Motion Picture Co., which allowed him to continue exploring issues related to Taiwan's urbanization. During this period, while his representation of Taipei fulfilled the government's propagandist demands, it also satisfied moviegoers' cosmopolitan yearnings through glimpses into a modern and urban middle-class lifestyle. Most importantly, he still managed to maintain his critical edge and probe urbanites' relationship with modern city space and the effect of urbanization on human psychology.

*Accidental Trio* interweaves the stories of three different families living in the same apartment building. The Zhangs, a traditionalist couple and their rebellious teenage daughter, Zhen-zhen, live on the top floor. In the beginning of the film, Zhen-zhen finds an excuse to run away from her suffocating home and is later introduced to her friend's notorious uncle Zhang Bo, who takes her along to explore Taipei's nightlife. Below the Zhang

family lives the newly wedded Wang couple. Mr. Wang lies to his wife about taking a two-day business trip to Kaohsiung and instead goes to meet his ex-fiancée, who has come back from the United States to persuade him to run away with her. Finally, there is the Hong family: a big family consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Hong, their four small children, and Mrs. Hong's parents. Mr. Hong always finds excuses to hide from household chores and the chaos created by his children. Unfortunately, after lying to his wife about working extra hours, he is swindled by a flirtatious woman at a bar and loses all his money after he goes to a hotel with her. All three storylines take place within a single day, and they intersect at several points in the film when the characters cross paths at the most embarrassing moments.

As in the opening credit sequence, the camera presents the Taipei cityscape, focusing on construction sites, high-rise buildings, and the impeccably clean streets, thus presenting Taipei as a modernized city. From the panoramic view of the cityscape, the camera gradually zooms in to an apartment complex, revealing the focus of the story. In fact, the film builds the story and the characters' relationships around the walk-up apartment building, the signature urban housing style in Taipei during the 1960s and 1970s. Walk-up apartments became extremely popular in postwar Taiwan because they could efficiently meet the urgent housing needs of the rapidly growing urban population (Lin 2018). These four- or five-story buildings could usually accommodate multiple families, but because the central stairway was the only public place to interact with other residents, this modern architectural design strengthened the alienation of city dwellers. Though people living in walk-up apartments seldom had the chance to see their neighbors, they could hear them because the buildings had poor soundproofing. The unique qualities of walk-up apartments offered Bai Jingrui a perfect setting to spotlight the urban lifestyle, which was simultaneously alienating and intimate.

From the panoramic view of the cityscape to the interior of the walk-up apartment, Bai Jingrui also shifted his attention in the opening scene from conceived space to lived space. In Lefebvre's triad conception, representational space is the space of everyday life, and it concerns how human beings use space and mold it for their own use. The scene that introduces all the characters and their apartments clearly presents Bai Jingrui's investigation of the relationship between the modern housing complex and its inhabitants who can adapt and appropriate the space within. More specifically, Bai Jingrui explored modern urbanites' alienation from each other because of the segmentation of space created by the unique structure of the walk-up apartment. With stylistic *mise-en-scène* and cinematography, he captures

the four apartments in the building, revealing their occupants' lifestyles and personalities even before the characters are introduced. In the film, the enclosed spaces—whether apartments or individual rooms—reinforce the characters' sense of alienation. In fact, they are not merely distanced from their neighbors; they are also isolated from other family members under the same roof. Like Mr. Hong, who spends most of his time hiding in the bathroom, the other characters have also withdrawn into their own spaces at home. The characters in *Accidental Trio* may be physically isolated from one another due to the unique layout of the walk-up apartment, but their curiosity about each other's lives compels them to pry into one another's business. This is illustrated in a well-executed scene at the beginning of *Accidental Trio*. When Zhen-zhen leaves her apartment to meet her friend, she accidentally sees the newlywed neighbors saying their morning goodbye intimately at their door. To avoid any embarrassment, she pretends to be unbothered and walks past the couple quickly. As she rushes down the stairs, the camera shifts to Mr. Wang, who, on his way out, hears noises coming from the downstairs neighbor. The camera catches him pausing to eavesdrop at Mr. Hong's door.

Bai Jingrui's depiction of apartment spaces capture the voyeuristic nature of modern society. He not only depicts the cramped living conditions of middle-class families in the city but also evokes a sense of suffocation through meticulously composed visuals featuring deliberate obstructions. Rather than presenting an unobstructed view of the characters and their actions, the camera frequently observes them through barriers such as furniture and window frames. This technique not only visually emphasizes the characters' emotional entrapment but also evokes a sense of voyeurism, making viewers feel as though they are peering into the family's private struggles. Additionally, Bai Jingrui often utilized framing within frames to heighten visual interest. For instance, in the scene where Mrs. Wang seeks Mrs. Hong's opinion about her husband's affair, each character is framed by an oval shape, breaking the film's predominant rectangular compositions. This stylistic decision emphasizes the characters' emotional reactions while adding visual complexity to the narrative.

Through the characters' excursion into the city, *Accidental Trio* documents the living space of the city through the process of feeling, seeing, and experiencing it. It presents the city outside the characters' homes as a playground for the middle class, yet urban life is filled with uncertainty and contingency. In the film, the characters run away from their suffocating home lives, but they keep running into one another as they indulge in the city's decadent nightlife. They discover one another's secrets and

misbehaviors and cannot help intervening in one another's business. For example, Mr. Wang wants to stop Zhen-zhen from going home with the playboy Zhang Bo at a night club, only for Zhen-zhen to threaten to tell Mrs. Wang about his date with another woman. Later, when Mr. Hong looks for help after he is swindled by the woman at the hotel, he comes across Mr. Wang, who is escorting his ex-fiancée back to her hotel room. Although they barely know their neighbors and try to stay out of one another's way, the city brings them together on this one night. The frustrations each character encounters away from home and their neighbors' timely interventions bring them to the realization that their homes are irreplaceable.

In the politically charged atmosphere of the late 1960s and 1970s, Bai Jingrui faced pressure to adhere to the government's Cold War narrative, even after leaving the CMPC. In *Accidental Trio*, for instance, there is an enthusiastic endorsement of the KMT's progressive stance, displaying the government's vision of modern space and accomplishment in urban construction. However, beneath this compliance lay a subtle critique, addressing the theme of modern alienation. The film dissects the impact of urban living on individuals' psychology by portraying tangible home elements such as walk-up buildings and spatial segmentation. By juxtaposing the government's idealized narrative with the reality of citizens' experiences, Bai Jingrui subtly highlights the drawbacks of rapid urban growth and modernization. He adeptly navigates the constraints of a politically guided film industry to subtly challenge prevailing ideologies.

### **Negotiating Representation: City, Home, and Nation in Bai Jingrui's Films**

As Poshek Fu and Man-Fung Yip (2020, 2) have argued, to look at Cold War cinema from the perspective of the binary opposition between propaganda and art, ideology, and entertainment, is too simplistic. As they have observed, the fact that many filmmakers chose to align themselves with certain ideologies should not be viewed as reflecting their personal ideological beliefs; these alignments also served as a tactical means to reach industrial or individual goals. Their perspective challenges the notion of the Cold War as the exclusive determining factor, suggesting it was just one of the numerous influences driving Asian cinemas during that era. In his early years at the CMPC, Bai Jingrui struggled to maintain a balance between the government's ideological demands and his social critique and had a rough relationship with the film censors. As a result, he was constantly

asked to modify his works, causing ruptures and inconsistencies in his films' narratives. Nevertheless, by the late 1960s, when he had established himself in the local film industry, he found his own way to package and frame his social commentary.

To balance out his serious scrutiny of lived spaces, Bai Jingrui embraced the comedy genre and flashy film form in *Accidental Trio* and other urban films from this period; more importantly, he reiterated the value of home and connected it to a positive image of Taipei. In the opening credit sequence of *Accidental Trio*, the modern and glamorous cityscape is accompanied by the film's theme song sung by Su-rong Yao, "Not Going Home Tonight" (*Jintian bu huijia*), which echoes the film's message about the sweetness of home.<sup>4</sup> Contrary to the song's title, the lyrics repeatedly ask those who are lost to go home. Correspondingly, although the film shares its Chinese title with the song, all the characters eventually return home after their exciting excursions into the city's nightlife. In fact, the theme of homecoming is central to Bai Jingrui's other films from this period, including *Home Sweet Home*, a CMPC production that responded to the government's call to study-abroad students to return to Taiwan and contribute to society. The Chinese title of the film, *Jia zai taibei*, translates to "home in Taipei." In her analysis of *Home Sweet Home*, Shen Shiao-ying argues that the film formulates a Taipei that embodies the ideals of a nation and casts Taipei as the all-Chinese urban home.<sup>5</sup>

Although the homecoming message satisfies the government's ideological demands, it is also important to note that, by treating Taipei instead of Taiwan as home, the film moves beyond traditional nationalism to suggest identity construction beyond the nation-state. Because of rapid urbanization and globalization, cities were emerging as a crucial part of one's identity, and city-based identity can be seen as a complement to the existing form of state-based nationalism that the KMT government tried to fortify during the Cold War. By focusing on the city inhabitants' lived space and proposing a city-based

4 The lyrics are as follows: "Wandering men, wandering hearts / You are lost at the crossroads / Not going home tonight / Why don't you go home tonight? / ... / Not going home tonight / Why? Why don't you go home? / Heart is where the dream is / Don't forget the sweetness of home / Lost people don't forget the sweetness of home" (*Accidental Trio*). Ironically, when the song was released in 1969, the Government Information Office banned it and required the record company to change its title to "Going Home Tonight" (*jintian yao huijia*) because it thought the song undermined public morals.

5 She contends that the film actually shows the audience more of Taiwan than Taipei through the characters' visits to their families: the idyllic farm in the mountains, Sun Moon Lake, and Zengwen Reservoir. "Taipei" in the film's Chinese title, therefore, can be seen to represent Taiwan in *Home Sweet Home*. See Shen 2007, 40–41.

identity, Bai Jingrui's urban films of the late 1960s and the early 1970s further suggested a new form of identification and helped foster a local identity.

After the success of his urban comedies and dramas in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, Bai Jingrui finally had an opportunity to make *Goodbye Darling*, a realist film loosely adapted from Chen Yingzhen's 1964 short story, "The Generals" (*Jiangjun zu*) for Wan Sheng Motion Picture Co. in 1970.<sup>6</sup> The film moves away from the middle-class family and the urban themes common in his earlier work to instead follow a young woman working with a music troop in a rural town, who tries to convince her good-for-nothing boyfriend, Ah-lang, to settle down and build a family. Surprisingly, in contrast to the film's overall pessimistic and realist tone, the ending is abruptly didactic. Bai Jingrui (1995, 6) disclosed that the government was not pleased with the theme of poverty in this film, so he had to add a new ending following the death of Ah-lang—a scene shot in Taipei that features the high-rise buildings along Dunhua North Road. The moralizing voice-over intones: "Now the pedicabs have become obsolete, and the slums demolished. Instead, the glittery roads and high-rise buildings have replaced them. What about people like Ah-lang? His impulsive romance and ways of living can no longer keep up with our society; therefore, he deserves his own demise. We could only feel sorry for him and say, Goodbye Ah-lang." In the end, it is the modern city scene and the didactic message that redeems the film and its realist portrayal of Taiwan. While Bai Jingrui was fully aware of the significance of the modern and progressive image of Taipei in the KMT's Cold War propaganda by this time, he still insisted on making a realist film like *Goodbye Darling*. The film marked his final attempt to challenge the government-prescribed ideology, and, afterward, he gave up realist filmmaking, shifting entirely to escapist romantic melodramas.

In 1995, Taiwan's Golden Horse Film Festival published an anthology entitled *Focus on Taipei through Cinema, 1950–1990* when Bai Jingrui was the director of the festival's executive committee. His book preface shows his passion for cinematic Taipei, which he had a role in creating during the 1960s and 1970s. He claims that, like in Italian neorealist films, it would be unrealist if cities were missing in postwar Taiwan cinema (Bai 1995, 6). Responding to Lefebvre's argument that every society produces its own space, Bai Jingrui was aware of the historical significance of documenting the city at a time when Taiwan had just begun its modernizing projects (Lefebvre 1991, 31). Due to political constraints during the Cold War, Bai Jingrui was forced to

6 Chen Yingzhen's "The Generals" was first published in the famous literary magazine in Taiwan, *Modern Literature* (1960–1973).

compromise his realist filmmaking and shift to easily consumable genre films. He was also required to weave the government's conceived space into his contemplation of city dwellers' lived space—both are representations, although of different natures. He serves as a prime example of a filmmaker struggling to balance the government's ideological requirements with personal artistic expression during the Cold War. Nevertheless, his films from this period did not merely use the city as the story's backdrop, as most of his fellow filmmakers' works did; they also actively participated in the production of space and the image making of the city.

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## 5. Islamic Enclaves in Taipei and Transnational Entanglements during the Cold War

*Janice Hyeju Jeong*

**Abstract:** This chapter unravels the interconnections between Taipei and Mecca during the Cold War through a focus on the mobilities of Chinese and Uyghur Muslim religious and political representatives, as well as diaspora communities who had been clustered within the two nation-states of the Republic of China and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Such actors mobilized the rhetoric of anticommunist Islam as a source of self-empowerment, and as a tool of religious and cultural diplomacy. Diverse and sometimes competing Islamic enclaves and communities in Taipei are positioned as hubs of inter-Asian connections that were restructured in a transformed post-WWII world order.

**Keywords:** Taipei, Mecca, Islam, mobility, inter-Asia

### Introduction

Throughout the Cold War, Taipei was home to many religious institutions and communities. Lesser known among them are pockets formed by heterogeneous Muslim individuals who hailed from across the contemporary borders of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Following the epochal event of 1949—the victory of the Communist Party over the Nationalist Party—an estimated twenty thousand who professed Islam including former politicians, military generals, civilians, religious leaders, and their families hurriedly settled in Taipei as exiles and refugees. Perhaps ever more so than in mainland China, individuals from divergent geographic and doctrinal backgrounds found themselves clustered in the city—forced to make a living,

formulate relations with the central state, and manage external religious channels within the transnational bloc allied with Taiwan and the United States. In this sense, Islamic enclaves in Taipei represented a partial replica of different strands of Islamic networks that had been active within the contemporary borders of the PRC in the first half of the twentieth century, relocated to the island country under the radically altered conditions of exile and Cold War geopolitics.

While the Cold War period tends to be interpreted as the age of secular nation-states, this chapter brings to the fore the intertwinement between migratory flows, transnational religious networks, and international political propagandas that unfolded across inter-Asian landscapes, with Taipei as a major center. The most emblematic Islamic structure is the Grand Mosque built in Taipei in 1960 in Da'an district. As shown by Barbara Pillsbury (1978, 241–72), and more recently by Hsiu-Ping Bao (2019, 137–60), Włodzimierz Cieciora (2018, 135–55), and Kelly Hammond (2022, 171–93), the Grand Mosque not only served communal purposes, but was a politicized space where Muslim leaders pulled in the diplomatic interests of the Republic of China (ROC) for their own benefit. The Chinese Islamic Association was housed within the mosque, headed by the former Minister of Defense Bai Chongxi (白崇禧 1893–1966). The appointment of a prominent military commander-cum-politician as the president of a religious organization—a gesture that had been renewed from the WWII years—symbolizes the explicit interpenetration between the religious sphere as represented by the mosque, and the political agendas of the Nationalist Party. The mosque also functioned as a site for showcasing and lubricating external relations with Muslim-majority societies: a staunch rhetoric of anticommunist Islamic solidarity continued to be propagandized in the mosque's publications throughout the Cold War, and when foreign dignitaries from Muslim-majority societies visited Taiwan, the itineraries often included a tour of the mosque. The visit of King Faisal of Saudi Arabia in 1971 was a particularly landmark event in consideration of the strong economic and diplomatic ties between Taiwan and Saudi Arabia and was received with much fanfare from across political and religious spectrums.

I build upon previous scholarship but also move beyond the vertical relationship between Muslim leaders in Taipei and the ROC to unravel the horizontal layers of transregional mobility across the so-called Third World that emanated from, and converged in, Islamic enclaves in Taipei. As a case study and a method, I juxtapose Taipei with Mecca, the global city with universal significance for believers worldwide. The channels of travel between Taipei and Mecca were delineated by the annual pilgrimage, the

language of anticommunist solidarity, and strong economic and diplomatic ties between the nation-states of Saudi Arabia and Taiwan. The arguments and persons that circulated between Taipei and Mecca, however, were far from uniform. Multiple actors and ideas flowed through these channels—anticommunist Islam, diasporic individuals from mainland China, and competing claims on self-representation and sovereignty proposed by divergent strands of Chinese Muslim and Uyghur intellectuals and political escapees.

Unraveling the trails of Muslim figures between Taipei and Mecca sheds new light on Taipei as a city where different actors mobilized the rhetoric of anticommunist Islam through transnational ties. Anticommunist networks, which were anchored in the three cities of Taipei, Singapore, and Hong Kong, could converge with the rhetoric of anticommunist Islamic solidarity that gained currency in US-allied polities elsewhere in the Middle East—with Saudi Arabia being a primary example. In this way, anticommunism and its associated networks could expand spatially beyond the realm of East and Southeast Asia, and conceptually incorporate other religious, or pan-Islamic articulations of anticommunism. The places and actors who built and mediated such politicized networks were in-between diasporic figures who often get categorized as minorities in the context of majoritarian nationalism.

In bringing to the fore the neglected overlaps between anticommunism and transnational Islamism in Cold War inter-Asian spaces, I pay particular attention to diasporic players and cities where their lives and activities unfolded. Tim Ingold (2009, 33–34), among others, argues against abstracting the notion of “space” and reducing “place” to being internally bounded. In Ingold’s words:

...lives are led not inside places but through, around, to and from them, from and to places elsewhere ... It is as wayfarers, then, that human beings inhabit the earth. ... [human existence] unfolds not in places but along paths. Proceeding along a path, every inhabitant lays a trail. Where inhabitants meet, trails are entwined, as the life of each becomes bound up with the other. Every entwining is a knot, and the more that lifelines are entwined, the greater the density of the knot. Places, then, are like knots, and the threads from which they are tied are lines of wayfaring ... Places, then, are delineated by movement, not by the outer limits to movement (Ingold 2009, 33).

The Muslim community in Taipei during the Cold War was not an enclosed religious or immigrant entity bounded within Taipei, but a collection of

paths that became entangled with one another and could spread to different directions, including Mecca. Crisscrossing trails forged by individual actors constituted the space between Taipei and Mecca, which different claimants to religious and political authority during the Cold War could traverse and capitalize on.

I first illustrate the alignment between the annual pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*) from Taipei and inter-state religious and cultural diplomacy in the geopolitical context of the Cold War. I then show that, within such shared space and rhetoric, exiled Chinese Muslims based in Saudi Arabia made return migrations to Taiwan—the alternative political homeland on which they had never set foot, yet that represented legitimate sovereign China, as seen in the case of Ibrahim Yusuf Khan. After highlighting the two-way movements back and forth between Taipei and Mecca, the third and last section brings to the fore the conflicts between Chinese Muslim religiopolitical figures that unfolded in Mecca over the issue of Chinese sovereignty and that of East Turkistan. By disassembling these three layers of transnational religious and political networks between Taipei and Mecca that coalesced in Taipei's Islamic quarters, I extend the geographic scope of analysis for Taiwan's external engagements during the Cold War and argue for the significance of the religious sphere in mediating such outreach; I also highlight the experiences of individuals whose lives were split between dispersed localities due to conditions of war.

### **Pilgrimage Missions from Taipei to Mecca**

In the English language, Ma Kainan (1988), Makio Yamada (2015, 601–22), and Wang Tingyi (1993, 63–82) have illustrated the strong bilateral ties between Taiwan and Saudi Arabia during the Cold War. This was aided by large-scale oil export from Saudi Arabia to Taiwan, Taiwan's agricultural projects in Saudi Arabia, and cultural diplomacy dictated by anticommunist agendas and Islamic pilgrimage delegations, which competed against Beijing's own outreach to the region. Wang Tingyi (1993, 64) has thus described Taiwan's foreign policy in the Middle East as “limited in scope, but with an emphasis” that placed particularly strong stress on its ties with Riyadh due to the critical importance of energy necessities. In recent Taiwanese scholarship, besides overviews of the ROC–Arab world relations, several theses have recently focused particularly on the collaboration between Taiwan and Saudi Arabia in the agricultural sector during the 1960s and 70s, and on

the transformation of the PRC–Saudi diplomatic relations between 1970 and 1990 (Huang 2013; Chen 2011).

On the religious front, Islamic pilgrimage delegations from Taipei started to arrive in Mecca every year starting in 1954, a practice that had begun in the WWII years (Jeong 2021; Hammond 2020). After a hiatus that followed the exile of the Nationalist Party to Taipei, the annual-pilgrimage delegates once again acted as informal representatives of the republican Chinese state, with assistance from different governmental agencies. Dispatching of pilgrimage delegations constituted a part of the ROC's strategy of cultural diplomacy, as it battled for its place in the international arena and strove to maintain external contacts (Rawnsley 2000; Zheng 2017; Kung 2022). Taipei, therefore, needs to be seen as part of a global Islamic landscape during the Cold War, which led to the anticommunist Islamic front.

Especially up to the early 1970s, when the tide turned decisively towards the People's Republic of China (PRC) following its rapprochement with the US and ousting of Taiwan from the United Nations in 1971, pilgrimage delegations from Taipei conducted anticommunist, pan-Islamist propaganda directed against the PRC while simultaneously arranging meetings with Chinese Muslim settlers in the Hejaz and Saudi kings and bureaucrats. Already in 1956, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, and, shortly thereafter, Iraq (1958) severed relations with Taiwan one after another after recognizing the People's Republic of China. Another wave of countries in the region followed suit in 1971 (Iran, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Turkey) (Huwaitin 2002, 99, 104–6). By contrast, in the very same year, King Faisal paid a visit to Taipei and vetoed the resolution to expel Taiwan from the United Nations (Olimat 2014, 34). Saudi Arabia recognized the PRC only in 1990, one of the last countries to do so, followed by South Korea in 1992. Throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, pilgrimage missions to Saudi Arabia offered Taipei a regular means to interact with its staunch ally in the region.

On the part of Saudi Arabia, domestic and regional events injected renewed significance into Mecca and Islam as a foreign policy strategy. West Asia in the 1950s and 1960s witnessed simmering rivalries between conservative monarchies that had tight economic and military relations with the US, most notably Saudi Arabia which formed the main pillar of US presence in the region together with Iran and Israel, and revolutionary socialist regimes that received the tacit support of the Soviet Union. Among them, Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser of Egypt and his pan-Arabism attracted widespread popularity, posing a major sense of threat to Saudi leaders. In response, anticommunist, normative Islam served as an important strategic and ideological basis for Saudi Arabia to expand foreign influence and repress

internal left-wing movements, especially under King Faisal (r.1964–74) (Matthiesen 2018, 217–34). In 1979, growing ties between the Soviet Union and its leftist allies in Afghanistan, the Iranian Revolution, and the insurrection in Mecca led by Juhayman ‘Uthaybi further galvanized Saudi attempts to deploy transnational Islamism in controlled ways to manage opponents both at home and abroad (Hammond 2018, 147–64, 154–56).

At the onset of the Cold War, Chinese Muslim political exiles whose fates had been overturned by the victory of the Communist Party found themselves dispersed across the landscapes of Taiwan, Saudi Arabia, and in-between places such as Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Pakistan/India, and Turkey. The first pilgrimage delegation from Taipei to Mecca in 1954 was precipitated by a report submitted by one such person, Jelāl al-Dīn Wang Zengshan 王曾善 (1903–1961), to the ministry of foreign affairs. Wang Zengshan graduated from Istanbul University, joined the Nationalist Party as a member of the legislative assembly, and headed the extensive Chinese Muslim Goodwill Missions to the Near East almost immediately after Japanese aggression in China in 1937. With the victory of the Communist Party, he escaped from Urumqi, where he had briefly worked as the minister of civil affairs. He was then based in Karachi with his family, where he worked at Pakistan’s ministry of foreign affairs and commonwealth relations as a teacher and translator of the Chinese language. Wang kept the affiliation with the Nationalist Party from afar, directing relief funds from Taipei to Xinjiang refugees in Karachi and submitting reports on ongoing affairs in Pakistan.<sup>7</sup>

Wang’s briefings were urgent messages that elaborated on the PRC’s recent propaganda activities in the Middle East. He explained that the major strategies that Beijing had used since 1952 to approach the Middle East and the Islamic world were to gain international recognition and increase its allies. These included highlighting the well-being of Muslim populations in China by distributing English periodicals and designating “so-called Muslim autonomy districts” while “confining their movement within mainland China and trapping them in a state of deep distress” (“Juyu Zhonggong chaosheng tuanti qianzheng” 1954, 20). Starting in August 1953, according to Wang Zengshan, Communist China’s Embassy in Pakistan began inviting “Arab professors,” one by the name of Mohammed al-Jamali,

7 With increasing pressure from Pakistan that had recognized the People’s Republic of China in 1951, Wang Zengshan relocated to Istanbul as a professor of Chinese Studies in 1956. The previous year, he had attended the International Assembly of Muslim Youth in Karachi as a representative of the ROC.

who assumed the position as a professor of Arabic in Beijing and took charge of composing Arabic-language propaganda materials (“Juyu Zhonggong chaosheng tuanti qianzheng” 1954, 22–26). A grave concern, he added, was that Egypt, which had a strong presence in the Arab League, was on the verge of turning towards Communist China in search of new markets for its cotton, through the mediation of the Soviet embassy in Cairo (Shichor 1979, 42–45). The settlement of negotiations was imminent, Wang wrote, as the Egyptian trade delegation, after stopping by Taipei, had already visited India and Pakistan, and was now headed for mainland China. During that very month, at the time of the report’s writing he further pointed out, the Arab League conference was expected to discuss the issue of whether to officially recognize Beijing’s Communist China. Already in 1952, the PRC had attempted to dispatch a pilgrimage delegation headed by Da Pusheng 達浦生 (1874–1965)—the scholar and entrepreneur who had been based in Shanghai—which had stopped midway in Pakistan due to failure to obtain an entry visa to Saudi Arabia (“Juyu Zhonggong chaosheng tuanti qianzheng” 1954, 27–29).

In the face of the unfolding diplomatic battles in west Asia, Wang proposed an idea like that which had emerged during WWII: Strengthening ties with the Islamic world through “people’s diplomacy,” this time against communism rather than Japanese imperialism, was the essential step for Taipei. Wang’s follow-up list of suggestions to the ministry of foreign affairs included substantiating already existing friendly relations between countries in the Islamic world (*huijiao shijie* 回教世界) by working in the utmost capacity to establish embassies and consulates, gaining the sympathies of the Islamic countries towards Free China through people-to-people diplomacy and thereby obliterating communist activities through the mediation of the Chinese Islamic Association, and appointing a Muslim roving ambassador who would frequently circulate Muslim countries from his base, and who, using religious sentiments (*yong zongjiao ganqing* 用宗教感) and diplomatic mechanisms, would make speeches and form connections that would propagandize progress in Free China. Persons participating in world Islamic conferences, on their part, would need to reach out to the “overseas Chinese” (*huaqiao* 華僑) to propagandize anticommunist and anti-Russian agendas, and publicize Free China’s developments in aspects of party politics, military, finance, democracy, and land reforms (“Juyu Zhonggong chaosheng tuanti qianzheng” 1954, 28–29).

Four months after the writing of Wang’s report, five persons headed the Republic of China’s Islamic pilgrimage delegation. They received full support from Taiwan’s ministry of foreign affairs, ministry of commerce,

and ministry of interior affairs. Heading this 1954 mission in the heat of July was Yulbars Khan, a former Uyghur general who had allied with the Nationalist Party, and who now served as chair of the Office for the Chair of the Xinjiang Provincial Government in Taipei (Jacobs 2016, 188–218). Delegation members were reported to be versatile in foreign languages as Arabic, English, French, and Turkish, and healthy enough to endure the hot weather during the pilgrimage. One of the six members, for instance, was Wang Shiming, a graduate of al-Azhar University who worked as the vice consul of the seasonal consulate in Jeddah until it shut down in 1949.

The aims of the delegation to Mecca were threefold: 1) countering Chinese and Russian communist forces through propaganda; 2) comforting Xinjiang and northwestern Chinese (*xibei* 西北) residents in west Asia (*yaxi* 亞西); 3) making anticommunist connections around the world (“Juyu Zhonggong chaosheng tuanti qianzheng” 1954, 96). They first proceeded to Cairo, where they met dignitaries such as Amīn Hussēin, the mufti of Palestine, the secretary of the Arab League, the minister for the ministry of religion and *awaqāf*, and President Mohamed Naguib, to whom they passed the letter from Chiang Kai-shek. The members, however, had to cut short their propaganda activities in Egypt from twenty-three days to eleven days due to what they described as the marginalization of religious personalities in Egypt which reduced their enthusiasm about outside visitors. They headed to Mecca on 6 August, and the next day started their pilgrimage.

Mecca offered a meeting ground for different groups of Chinese Muslim diasporas that had begun new lives in places outside mainland China after escaping from Communist victory. Yulbars Khan's delegation, for example, reported meeting nine pilgrims who were originally from Yunnan but were now residing in northern Burma and Thailand. Also joining them were about forty “siblings sojourning abroad” (*qiaobao* 僑胞) in Saudi Arabia, originally from the Gansu-Qinghai-Ningxia region (“Juyu Zhonggong chaosheng tuanti qianzheng” 1954, 142). This number, the report made sure to note, did not include “compatriots from Xinjiang” (*Xinjiang qiaobao* 新疆僑胞) (“Juyu Zhonggong chaosheng tuanti qianzheng” 1954, 142). As Yulbars Khan's delegation stressed, “although the numbers [of overseas Chinese] were not many, the need to uphold our country united our minds” (“Juyu Zhonggong chaosheng tuanti qianzheng” 1954, 142). The report noted the assistance of a “Chinese emigrant in Mecca” (*yu Maijia qiaomin* 於麥加僑民) named Hajji Jin Zhiyuan 金志元漢志, and the pilgrimage guide Hasan Subhani (“Juyu Zhonggong chaosheng tuanti qianzheng” 1954, 142). Owing to their support, the delegation was able to display the national flag of the Republic of China “at the highest point of the Arafat Mountain, and show [it] to the 400,000

pilgrims gathered from around the world” (“Juyu Zhonggong chaosheng tuanti qianzheng” 1954, 142). By contrast, the “Hui traitors” from Tibet who were dispatched by the “bandits” (*feiwei suo paiqian zhi Xizang huijian* 匪偽所派遣之西藏回奸) were “too awed by fear at the face of our country’s flag to dare to publicly undertake any activities,” as were the twenty-one pilgrims sent by “Red Russia” (“Juyu Zhonggong chaosheng tuanti qianzheng” 1954, 142). In the heat of August, a member of the delegation reportedly passed on propaganda materials to the tents where Pakistan’s Prime Minister Muhammad Ali and Egypt’s Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasser were staying (“Juyu Zhonggong chaosheng tuanti qianzheng” 1954, 142).

A copy of the pamphlet that seems to have circulated in the Hejaz is now kept in an archive in Riyadh. Its contents again illustrate the refashioning of the idea of the Islamic world against imperialism into one against communism that now came to signify a shared enemy. It starts with the grave statement:

From the hajj delegation and Muslim brothers of the Republic of China to the pilgrims of the House of God of Haram, and Islamic delegations that have left their homes to emigrate near God and his Prophet, in search of reward and in desire of recompense. And to all Muslims who are ardent about their religion, concerned about the creed and are working to raise the flag of Islam and uphold the word ‘Muslims.’ And to all who are overjoyed by the tones of jihad and who pave the way for good work and honest struggle, we convey the news about *mujāhidīn*, and promote knowledge of those struggling in the various parts of China (“Nidā’ min Ba’tat al-Ḥajj wa-al-Ikhwā’ al-Islāmiyya al-Ṣīniyya al-Waṭaniyya ilā Ḥujjāj Bayt Allāh al-Ḥarām wa-ilā kull Muslim ghayūr ‘alā dīnihi” 1954, 3).

The next pages were replete with statements about the repression of Islam in communist China, the incompatibility of Islam with communism, and the need for Muslims worldwide and *umma* to come together as “a unified body” to resist communism (“Nidā’ min Ba’tat al-Ḥajj wa al-Ikhwā’ al-Islāmiyyah al-Ṣīniyyah al-Waṭaniyyah” 1954, 3). Again, the abstract concept of the united Muslim world, at the center of which lay Mecca, could be appropriated according to changing contexts and manifest in different forms as a rhetorical device to frame the travels of Chinese Muslim pilgrimage missions. For the next two decades, pilgrimage delegations from Taipei continuously emphasized the trope of their successful anticommunist propaganda towards Muslims worldwide and of the patriotism of the Chinese Muslim diaspora community in the Hejaz.

While reminiscent of the argument of anticommunist *mujāhidīn* fighters in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union two decades later in 1979, in the absence of actual armed conflict the idea of a united Muslim front against communist forces was used to facilitate diplomatic exchanges between the Republic of China and Saudi Arabia. While spreading the rhetoric of the struggle of universal Islam against communism, Yulbars Khan's delegation simultaneously initiated contacts with the highest echelons of Saudi leadership, and kept analytical views on the potential of Saudi Arabia as a stable ally of Taiwan. During their meeting with King Sa'ud in his palace in Jeddah on the morning of 14 August, the delegation recited out loud the letter from Chiang Kai-shek to the king, after which he reportedly expressed his happiness and conveyed his regards to the president ("Juyu Zhonggong chaosheng tuanti qianzheng" 1954, 143). They then met Prince Faisal, the minister of foreign affairs. The delegate Ma Fuliang (馬賦良) pitched his case to the prince.<sup>8</sup> He explained that, when China's vice consulate in Jeddah was closed four years earlier, the kingdom's "protection" of China's "sojourning subjects" (*qiaomin* 僑民) was mostly appreciated on the part of Taiwan ("Juyu Zhonggong chaosheng tuanti qianzheng" 1954, 143). Constructing Taiwan, on the other hand, was advancing leaps and bounds (*Taiwan jianshe mengjin* 台灣建設猛進), and a counteroffensive against Communist China was soon to materialize (*fangong zaiwang* 反攻在望) ("Juyu Zhonggong chaosheng tuanti qianzheng" 1954, 143).

In his "personal capacity" (*benren jin yi siren zige* 本人謹以私人資格), Ma Fuliang carefully inquired about the prince's thoughts on the possibility of resuming diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Taiwan at the ambassadorial level ("Juyu Zhonggong chaosheng tuanti qianzheng" 1954, 143). Prince Faisal agreed on such a possibility any time in the future and asked that, if China (Taiwan) was willing, the delegation could suggest to the government upon return and officially dispatch a person to initiate the talks. Following their encounter with Prince Faisal, the delegation met the minister of finance Abdullah Suleiman who had worked in the ministry for thirty-five years, Prince Abdullah Faisal (eldest son of Prince Faisal), the interior minister, and Sheikh Mohammed Surūr al-Sabān (1898–1971) at his private residence. The report described him as a scholar of Sudanese origin who was respected throughout the Islamic world, a diplomat, and a figure deeply trusted by the king ("Juyu Zhonggong chaosheng tuanti qianzheng"

8 Ma Fuliang had accompanied Isa Alptekin on pilgrimage missions during World War II.

1954, 144).<sup>9</sup> In the later years, al-Sabān would continue his relations with pilgrimage delegations from Taipei as the first secretary-general of the World Muslim League (established in 1962), and as the second minister of finance. In their meetings, the pilgrimage delegates consistently expounded on the “schemes of communist bandits, oppression of Muslims in China” and gratitude towards Saudi Arabia for its hospitable treatment of Chinese settled in the country (“Juyu Zhonggong chaosheng tuanti qianzheng” 1954, 143).

Without the tangible presence of diplomatic institutions of China in Saudi Arabia or vice versa, interactions between the states unfolded through sojourning religious representatives. Just before departure, they visited King Saud again to bid farewell, at which the king granted a full set of clothing to Yulbars Khan, and to every pilgrim delegate a gold watch, a knife, and a set of clothing and a wristwatch. The 1954 report concluded that, despite the pilgrimage delegation’s shortcomings, it took “consolation in the fact that under the name of private organization and without assistance from an embassy or a consulate, [we] were able to constantly and freely undertake [our] agendas according to plans” (“Juyu Zhonggong chaosheng tuanti qianzheng” 1954, 145-46). The summary of their conversation with Prince Faisal on the potential establishment of the embassy was cut out and forwarded to different agencies.

While self-made claims should not be interpreted definitively as factual realities, prior to the establishment of the Republic of China’s embassy in Jeddah in 1957, these pilgrimage missions provided channels for the exiled government in Taipei to resume forging interstate relations with potential allies in west Asia and to gather information about future directions in the region. Accompanying Ma Bufang was Xiong Zhenzong 熊振宗 (1914–62), a former imam of Guangzhou’s Huaisheng mosque who had studied in al-Azhar University in Cairo, and served as one of the first imams in the first mosque in Taipei located on Xinsheng Nanlu, which had preceded the Grand Mosque. Xiong wrote in his report that, while Saudi Arabia had a two-sided approach in its external relations—one characterized by a military alliance with Egypt and another by an economic alliance with the United States—for cases of instability such as a falling out with Egypt, Saudi Arabia would be pressured to gravitate towards the United States due to

9 A prominent writer, poet, publisher, statesman and economist, Mohammed Sourrour al-Saban was born in Qunfodah and raised in Mecca. It has been claimed that he has Somali origins. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Mu’allim ‘Alī [محمد حسين معلم علي], “Abāqira lahum uṣūl fī manṭiqat al-Raḡn al-Ifīqī (1)” [Geniuses Have Their Origins in the Region of Horn of Africa عباقرة لهم أصول في منطقة القرن الإفريقي], Mogadishu Center for Research and Studies, 4 September 2014, <http://bit.ly/32cwfR6>.

its economic interests. He thus proposed that Taiwan build relations with Saudi Arabia based on commercial and cultural collaborations. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia as the protector of the holy cities was predicted to continue to have a leading spiritual role amongst Islamic countries worldwide, and, as such, would not want to recognize “communist bandits” (“Zhongguo Huijiao Chaojintuan Baogao” 1956).

It should be noted that the PRC, after its founding, also briefly utilized religious networks to organize contacts with dignitaries in Saudi Arabia, a tactic that it used again in the 1980s in the absence of official diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia. Ironically, some of the most influential pilgrims and translators who assisted the Communist Party's initial outreach to states in west Asia during the first few years of its establishment were Muslim political representatives who had worked with the Nationalist Party. Heading the first pilgrimage mission from Beijing in 1955, for instance, was the former entrepreneur and scholar Imam Da Pusheng, who had founded the Islamic teachers school in Shanghai and headed anti-Japanese Islamic pilgrimage missions during WWII.<sup>10</sup> Da Pusheng had now become the vice chairman of the Chinese Islamic Association that was founded in Beijing in 1952. In 1955, a pilgrimage delegation from Beijing that he led successfully reached Mecca, possibly due to Zhou Enlai's repeated requests to then-Crown Prince Faisal to grant visas to pilgrims from mainland China when they met at the Bandung Conference (“Report from the Chinese Foreign Ministry” 1955). According to Da Pusheng's account, the delegation received “great respect” in Saudi Arabia and forged contacts with other state representatives.<sup>11</sup>

The pilgrimage delegations during the early years of the Cold War show that Chinese Muslim political figures, some of whom were former warlords, and

10 The first pilgrimage missions that received official endorsement by the Communist Party set out to Mecca in 1952, yet could not proceed from Karachi to Mecca as they were denied visas from the Saudi embassy in Pakistan, which warned the delegation against conducting communist propaganda in Saudi Arabia. “Chinese Islamic Delegation's Visit to Pakistan,” 1952, British Foreign Office Files, FO 371/999367.

11 Da Pusheng recounted that the nineteen members of the delegation were composed of Hui, Uighur, and Dongxiang Muslims from Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Xinjiang, Gansu, Yunnan, Shandong, Qinghai, and Hebei, some of them imams, students, elderly figures (*xianglao* 鄉老), and professors. The delegation also visited Egypt, Pakistan, and India after performing the pilgrimage (Da and Muhammad 1958, 101–4). The article had originally been published in the journal *Shijie Zhishi* 世界知識, 2, 1956.

scholars rearranged their religious and political nexus in a setting that was radically transformed. The strengthening of ties between Taiwan and Saudi Arabia as US allies—and as parties seeking to diversify relations outside its orbit—stimulated circulations of religious diplomatic figures. They acted as carriers of messages and information between state authorities prior to exchanges of embassies and attempted to win the support of diaspora populations in Saudi Arabia whom they regarded as affiliated with China. The dispatches of pilgrimage delegations from the Grand Mosque, and the showcasing of the mosque to foreign dignitaries as living proof of Islam's vibrancy in Taiwan, should be seen in such a broader geopolitical context where Islamic diplomacy continued to have currency in Asia. In this respect, Taipei represented a continuum of Japan's Islam policy in the interwar period through WWII and served as an exemplar for the emerging community of Muslims in the Republic of Korea.<sup>12</sup>

### Taipei as a Destination for Overseas Chinese Muslims: The Case of Ibrahim Yusuf Khan

The channels of religious diplomacy between Mecca and Taipei drew in actors who had been positioned outside the immediate network of dispersed Chinese Muslim political circles. One of them was Ibrahim Yusuf Khan, also known as Ma Jixiang 馬吉祥, who left trails in Taipei during his several years of sojourn. His obituary was published in Taipei's Islamic periodical in 1988, written by Badr al-Dīn Hai Weiliang 海維諒 (1912–2006), a scholar and diplomat who had spent twenty years in Jeddah as a secretary at the Taiwanese embassy in Jeddah and retired to Taipei.

In the obituary, one finds state and semi-governmental religious institutions that modulated Ibrahim's course of itineraries. Born in Ningxia's Helan County Qingshuibao (賀蘭縣清水鮑) in 1933 or 1934 as the eldest of nine siblings, Ibrahim Yusuf Khan made the pilgrimage to Mecca in 1946 with his whole family. With the victory of the Communist Party, rather than returning they permanently settled in Mecca by engaging in commerce (*jingshang* 經商). As his father Yusuf had been particularly concerned about the children's education, his eldest son Ibrahim attended elementary to high school in Mecca and entered the law department at King Saud University in Riyadh. He also studied at Cairo's al-Azhar University for two years, and, upon returning, became an employee at the ministry of education (Hai 1988, 10).

12 For general contours of the Central Mosque in Seoul, see Song 2016, 37–68.

When Ibrahim made the trip to China in the late 1960s, almost two decades after his family's pilgrimage to Mecca, it was not to his father's home province Ningxia, but to Taipei. Mediating the trip was the Saudi ministry of education and a recommendation from the World Muslim League,<sup>13</sup> which, as we will see later, had been established in 1962 in Mecca as a religious diplomatic institution. According to Badr al-Dīn Hai Weiliang, as relations between Saudi Arabia and Taiwan tightened, to promote cultural exchanges Ibrahim was appointed to head to Taiwan to teach Arabic at the Faculty of Oriental Language and Literature at Taipei's Chengchi University in 1969. The next year, the World Muslim League obtained approval from the department of education and recommended Ibrahim as the imam of the Taipei Grand Mosque, a position he held for five years. In 1976, he was called back to Saudi Arabia and was dispatched to Southeast Asia for religious propagation. While working, he also enrolled in a university in Jakarta and obtained a doctorate degree in law. After returning to Saudi Arabia, he was sent to North Africa, but in 1988 he died in an unfortunate car accident in Morocco at the age of fifty-six. The news shocked the community of Muslims in Taipei, and a prayer gathering was held after the *jum'a* on 8 August.

The career of Ibrahim Yusuf Khan shows how the internal formalization of education and religious diplomacy, and external changes in interstate relations, drew in portions of the diasporic community in Saudi Arabia to become diplomatic agents of state institutions. His father Yusuf, or Ma Ziliang (馬子良), was a scholar who had not had prior political affiliations with the Nationalist Party. In a survey of Lhasa's Muslim community, Yusuf Ma Ziliang is described as an imam (*Ahong*) from Ningxia who taught in Lhasa's Small Mosque for two to three years and later moved to Saudi Arabia (Chen 2000, 87–94). He trained a dozen disciples, one of whom encountered him during his own pilgrimage to Mecca in 1957. Whereas Yusuf undertook the travels along the older routes of pilgrimage and scholarship through Tibet, the course of his son Ibrahim Yusuf's posts and travels unfolded in the space arranged by the World Muslim League and the ministry of education in Saudi Arabia that absorbed diasporic populations in the Hejaz during one generational shift. A turn of events changed the direction, shape, character, and mechanics of mobility.

13 In an announcement in 1970, the periodical of the Chinese Muslim Association in Taipei relayed the news that "Hajji Ibrahim Yusuf Khan (Chi-hsiang Ma), in response to the recommendation of MWL, has been appointed as Imam of Taipei Mosque." "Ten Important Events for Chinese Muslim in 1969," *Zhongguo Huijiao* 中國回教 136: 4.

Ibrahim Yusuf Khan himself composed a short text about his sojourn in Taipei, as a representative of Saudi Arabia. The visit of King Faisal to Taipei in 1971, a landmark event for the development of bilateral relations between Taiwan and Saudi Arabia, prompted Ibrahim Yusuf to publish a short booklet on the general history of Saudi Arabia and the various programs implemented under King Faisal. As he notes in the Arabic preface, he had been sent by the kingdom “to proceed on the path with children of Chinese brothers towards the desired end in the fields of *da’wah* (missionary work) and education” (Ma Jixiang Ibrahim Yusuf Khan 1971, 5). He was thus working as a language teacher at Chengchi University and as an imam of the Taipei Mosque. More than serving the sectors of language and Islamic education, he wanted his position to extend to the “general domain of cultures” (Ma Jixiang Ibrahim Yusuf Khan 1971, 5). Publications and books, he believed, were a way to “open windows of thought between the two peoples” (Ma Jixiang Ibrahim Yusuf Khan 1971, 5). The book, written in Chinese, was a result of such reflection.

As an official representative of Saudi Arabia who had spent most of his life in the Hejaz, Ibrahim Yusuf seems to have made extra efforts to adjust to Taipei. He added in the Chinese version of the preface that, when he had first come to Taiwan four years prior, because he had no foundation in the Chinese language he had to carry out his responsibilities while being unsure whether meanings were conveyed. Because he thought that linguistic tools were essential for successfully publicizing a culture (*dacheng xuanyang yizhong wenhua* 達成宣揚一種文化), he studied the Chinese language day and night (Ma Jixiang Ibrahim Yusuf Khan 1971, 8). With the language thus learned, he authored the book in Chinese to introduce to the people of the ROC the past and present of Saudi Arabia, and King Faisal, whose visit, though short, carried profound implications for collaborations between the two countries in various areas (Ma Jixiang Ibrahim Yusuf Khan 1971, 7).

Remnants of records relating to Ibrahim Yusuf Khan are kept in a home belonging to Ibrahim Yusuf Khan’s daughter Khadija and her husband in Ta’if in western Saudi Arabia. Located about 90 km east of Mecca in a mountainous region, Ta’if was where most Chinese-speaking Muslim diaspora communities had settled since the 1950s (Jeong, 2023). Khadija, a retired middle school teacher, knew that her late father had spent some years in Taiwan but knew little about the details due to his early passing. Khadija, born of an Egyptian mother and Ibrahim Yusuf Khan, and her husband, born of a father from Ningxia and a mother from Hong Kong, had adopted Arabic as their native language and could not interpret any of

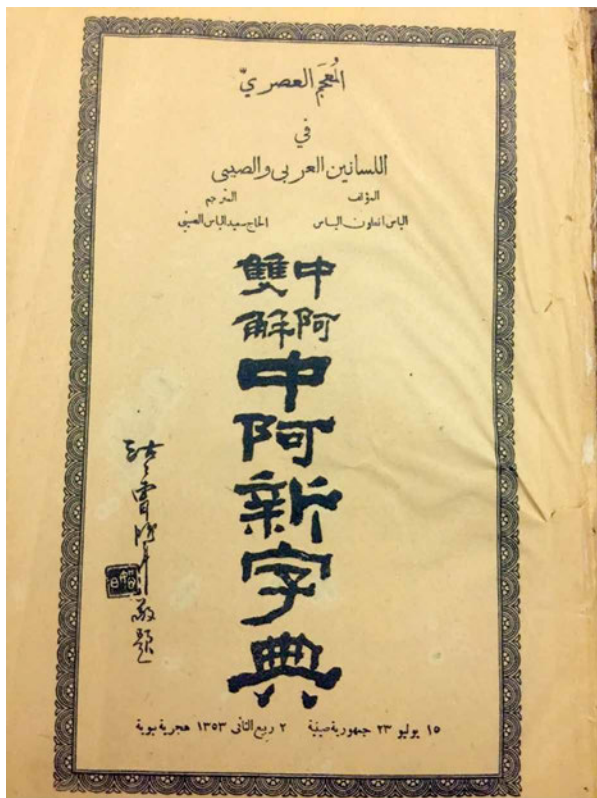


Figure 5.1. Cover page of the Sino-Arabic dictionary, translated by Wang Jingzhai (photographed by the author, 2017).

the records' meanings. Upon encountering Ibrahim Yusuf Khan's obituary published in Taipei, which I had translated, they showed the few records in their keeping. These included a Sino-Arabic dictionary, which had first been published in 1934 and republished in 1952 by Qingzhen Publishers in Beijing, that Khadija's father-in-law had kept in Ta'if.<sup>14</sup> Also in the couple's possession was a plaque of gratitude to Ibrahim Yusuf Khan from students at the Department of Oriental Language and Cultures at National Chengchi University in Taipei, and a letter of appreciation by an Indonesian Chinese Muslim association based in Jakarta.

Changing international relations during the Cold War impacted diasporas in the Hejaz on the most personal level, therefore not only severing ties to old homelands but instigating new connections between existing settlers and newcomers and directing their travels to Taipei. Going back and forth

<sup>14</sup> The original version, *Elias Modern Dictionary Arabic-English*, had been printed in Cairo by the Elias Modern Publishing House. Wang Jingzhai, a Beijing-based imam from Tianjin, had utilized the dictionary to print an Arabic-Chinese version.

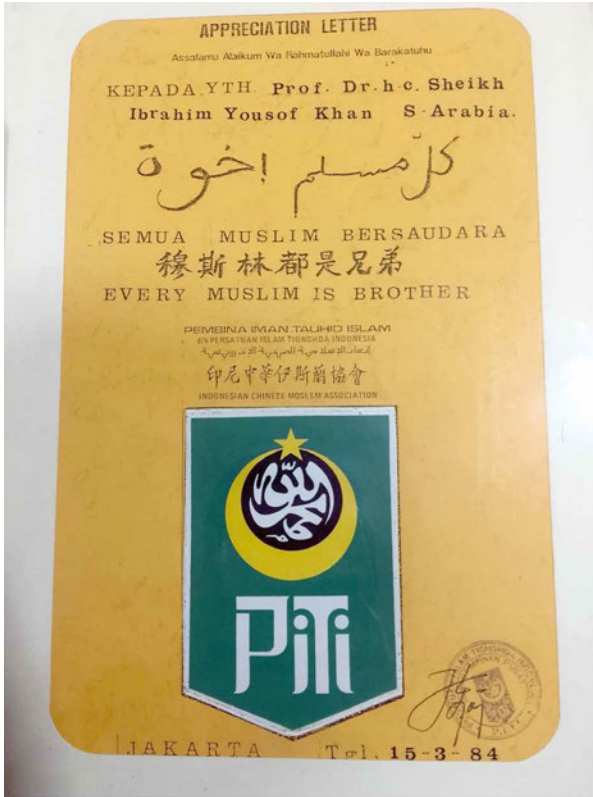


Figure 5.2. Appreciation letter from the “Indonesian Chinese Moslem Association” to Ibrahim Yusof Khan, Jakarta (photographed by the author, 2017).

between textual and personal encounters uncovered trails of Ibrahim Yusuf Khan, who discovered the entirely new place of Taipei as legitimate China through mediations of state and religious institutions based in Mecca and Taipei.

### Contested Sovereignties and Factional Controversies in Mecca’s World Muslim League

If Chinese Muslim settlers in Taiwan and Saudi Arabia became parts of the two states’ institutions as cultural or religious diplomats, for Turkic Muslims exiled from China, mobilizing diasporic networks through the symbol of Mecca and the geographies interconnected with the city meant claiming sovereignty of a state that no longer existed in territorial reality. Linkages between diaspora, diplomacy, and statehood were inseparable for leaders’ claiming independence for East Turkistan outside its very geography.

*Turkistani Émigrés in the Hejaz and the World Muslim League in Mecca*

Chinese Muslim pilgrimage missions kept a sustained interest in undertaking outreach to the community of settlers from Xinjiang in the Hejaz especially during the early years of the Cold War. Yet, many of them had already been pulled into a different circle of émigrés who upheld the sovereignty of East Turkistan in domains outside territorial Xinjiang. Ma Huanwen (馬煥文), who had been a part of Ma Bufang's pilgrimage delegation in 1956 and once again led the delegation of 1966, noted in his travelogue that escapees from Xinjiang in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere were blaming the whole Chinese government for the sufferings that people in Xinjiang had undergone under the rule of Yang Zengxin and Sheng Shicai, the regional governors who had presided over the region. The government of Saudi Arabia, on its part, regarded emigrants from Xinjiang as equals (*tongren* 同仁) based on the convention that "there exists religion, no categorical division" (*'youjiao wule' guanli* 有教無類慣例) (Ma 1966, 11). In his view, emigrants from Xinjiang in Saudi Arabia were "stably settled, and continued livelihoods under an environment that is suitable for religious faith and way of life" (*zai shihe tamende zongjiao xinyang ji shenghuo huanjingxia anju xialai* 在適合他們的宗教信仰及生活環境下安居下來) (Ma 1966, 11). As "Chinese people are patient and diligent," he noted, "Xinjiang people are no exception" (*zhongguoren qinjiannailao de xixing, Xinjiang ren ye bu liwai* 中國人勤儉耐勞的習性, 新疆人也不例外) (Ma 1966, 11). Over the years, they accumulated considerable economic foundations in Saudi Arabia.

Some emigrants, he observed, had received an education, and occupied various positions in Saudi governmental and administrative institutions—some even rising to the position of police officers, prison guards, transmitter-receivers (*diantai* 電臺), and tax collectors (Ma 1966, 11). The same held true, he noted, for settlers from Gansu, Ningxia, and Qinghai. The Saudi government held a good impression of Xinjiang sojourner-settlers who were serving the government (*fuwu ji qiaojū de Xinjiang ren* 服務及僑居的新疆人) (Ma 1966, 12). However, he added, "these Xinjiang people in recent years have very little interaction with our Embassy," and emphasized the need to attract them to "come return to the bosom of the home country, and together fight to achieve the great cause of recovering the country" (*shi tamen chonghui zuguo de huaibao, gongtong zhili kangbao fuguo de daye* 使他們重回祖國的懷抱, 共同致力抗暴復國的大業) (Ma 1966, 12).

Contrary to the Taipei government's rhetorical claims to Xinjiang as a part of China, and its pilgrimage delegations' designation of Xinjiang settlers as a part of the Chinese diaspora, the Hejaz and the World Muslim League functioned as a stronghold for diasporic activists who rallied support for East

Turkistan's independence. One of the most influential and respected of them was Isa Yusuf Alptekin, who throughout his lifetime pushed for the economic and cultural autonomy of Xinjiang through political lobbying and active involvement in the print industry. Born in Yengisar County of Kashgar in western Xinjiang in 1901, Alptekin throughout the 1930s and 40s continuously juggled between the central government and regional provincial autonomy within it, while simultaneously building external connections (Benson 1991, 87–104). His position as the representative of East Turkistan during the Cold War thus extended back to the interwar years when he had led the First East Turkestan Republic (1933–34) and attempted to negotiate with the Nationalist Party on Xinjiang's autonomy, and onward to the WWII period. As he carried strong anti-Soviet and anticommunist sentiments, Alptekin was briefly appointed by the Nationalist Party as the delegate to the National People's Assembly in Nanjing (1946) and secretary-general of the Xinjiang Province (1947) in the post-WWII years (Benson 1991, 87–104). With Communist victory, however, Alptekin escaped from Urumqi to Kashmir through Ladakh with several hundred others and settled in Istanbul. Alptekin henceforth turned Istanbul into a center for publishing books and periodicals such as *Türkistan*, *Türkistan'ın Sesi* (Voice of Turkestan), and *Doğu Türkistan'ın Sesi* (Voice of Eastern Turkestan) (Kuşçu 2013, 73–94).

With Istanbul as a pivotal center, proponents of East Turkistan found in the Hejaz patrons among the robust Central Asian community, many of whom had experienced brutal wars and repression back home, while connecting with religiopolitical dignitaries in the Hejaz. The same year that the embassy of the Republic of China was established in Jeddah in 1957 with Hussein Ma Bufang as the ambassador, the state newspaper *Umm al-Qurā* published a letter of appreciation from Isa Yusuf Alptekin to King Sa'ud. The article explained that Alptekin had come to Mecca during the pilgrimage season in 1957 as the representative of the East Turkistan liberation movement. He had “already broadcast the cruel conditions inside the Islamic country” (“Ra’is Markaz al-Kifāh li-Turkistān al-Sharqiyya yashkur Jalālat al-Malik” 1957). His letter, printed in the newspaper upon his request, further expressed his “gratitude to God at having joined the gathering of Muslims during the hajj, [where he could] publicize the situation of Turkistani brothers to those gathered” (“Ra’is Markaz al-Kifāh li-Turkistān al-Sharqiyya yashkur Jalālat al-Malik” 1957). Much of the letter was devoted to thanking the late King ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Āl-Sa’ūd and his successor King Sa’ud, who had stood at the “forefront of alleviating the pains of Turkistan's *muhājirīn*” (“Ra’is Markaz al-Kifāh li-Turkistān al-Sharqiyya yashkur Jalālat al-Malik” 1957).

The Saudi government, Alptekin continued, “was the pioneer among Islamic countries in providing accommodation for Turkistanis, welcoming them and assisting them with all the support they could provide, and making it easier for them to reside in the secure and blessed country” (“Ra’īs Markaz al-Kifāḥ li-Turkistān al-Sharqiyya yashkur Jalālat al-Malik” 1957). Turkistani *muhājirīn*, thanks to the care of the Kings, and as residents (*muwāṭinīn*) of the country, were living stable lives with the freedom to work, also enrolling in Saudi schools and becoming governmental employees. The royal goodwill clearly indicated, Alptekin wrote, that the Majesties were “not only protectors of the Haramayn and the Arabs, but of all Muslims” (“Ra’īs Markaz al-Kifāḥ li-Turkistān al-Sharqiyya yashkur Jalālat al-Malik” 1957). Alptekin was, then, “recording words of gratitude that fill every heart of Turkistani people” (“Ra’īs Markaz al-Kifāḥ li-Turkistān al-Sharqiyya yashkur Jalālat al-Malik” 1957).

For the next three decades or so, Isa Alptekin was able to garner the support and sympathies of the settlers from Central Asia in Saudi Arabia and present the issue to the World Muslim League, forging a space that the government in Taipei or its Muslim representatives could not penetrate. Though drawing strong alarm from Taiwan, supporters of the cause were more or less free to do what they aimed in the Hejaz, as long as they did not pose a threat to the Saudi regime itself.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the anticommunist language laid out by representatives of East Turkistan dovetailed well with the Saudi turn against Egypt and the Soviet Union that followed the rise of Nasser and revolutionary republics in the region, and its robust friendship with the United States.

The World Muslim League, founded in Mecca in 1962, has been portrayed as an organ of pan-Islamism of Saudi Arabia against secularism, communism, and Nasser’s pan-Arabism. Together with the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the League in the 1970s acted as a platform through which Saudi Arabia increased its presence in the Islamic world by using its position as guardian of the holy cities and the oil wealth that flowed in, giving the impression that “identifying with this Muslim world offered protection against secular and socialist threats from within the Arab world”

15 An activist with an ROC passport based in Saudi Arabia, for instance, raised thousands of Saudi riyals in 1972 to support the journey of a representative of independent East Turkistan sent by Isa Yusuf Alptekin to Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. He also congregated with other independence advocates during the pilgrimage season to appeal to the world’s Muslims to pray for Muslims in Xinjiang under Communist China. Despite protests from the Republic of China through its embassy, the Saudi government did not actively intervene in the matter; the ROC’s request to Saudi Arabia to oust said activist from Saudi territories was also sidelined. See Hirayama (2014, 23).

(Rasheed 2010, 128). The role of the World Muslim League in facilitating the flows of *mujāhidīn* fighters from the Hejaz to Afghanistan in the 1980s has also been noted.<sup>16</sup>

Yet, from the perspective of both Turkic and Chinese Muslims positioned outside mainland China during the Cold War, the World Muslim League represented one of the most reliable international platforms to propagandize the idea of a sovereign, independent state of East Turkistan, or that of the Republic of China. During the second meeting of the WML in 1963, Isa Yusuf Alptekin proposed a memorandum on Greater Turkistan to the annual meeting of the WML's Constituent Council. The seventh program on the 'East Turkistan question' that was passed requested protection of Turkistani refugees in different countries of their settlement. It further articulated ambitions for the independence of East Turkistan, urging governments to stop calling the area by the colonial name "Xinjiang," but to replace it with "East Turkestan," and prompted the WML Constituent Council's roving ambassador to the United Nations to relay statements by Turkistani representatives (Wu 1992, 63–64).

### *Contested Chinese Territories in the World Muslim League*

The World Muslim League was also an arena where Chinese Muslim pilgrimage delegates who represented the Nationalist Party sought to build international alliances in favor of the Republic of China. The claimed territorial extent of China's sovereignty included Xinjiang, leading to clashes between Taiwan's representatives in the World Muslim League and East Turkistani activists in the organization. Ironically, the issue of East Turkistan in the international venue of the World Muslim League exposed contentions among the Chinese Muslim religious and political leaders in Taiwan. The ways through which the issue of East Turkistan surfaced are telling of not only the factional feuds within the Chinese Muslim community in Taipei, but the reluctance or inability of Chinese Muslims who had been affiliated with the Nationalist Party, whether in Taiwan or in Saudi Arabia, to assert themselves amongst Uyghur diaspora activists.

While providing an international platform for Uyghur diasporas, the World Muslim League also kept relations with Chinese Muslim representatives

16 Thomas Hegghammer has noted the role of print media in encouraging travels of mujahideen fighters. The League also funded the studies of 'Abdullah Azzam, the critical theologian and scholar for mobilization of mujahideen, in International Islamic University of Islamabad. The League's branch in Peshwar also facilitated the movements of fighters. See Hegghammer (2010, 573–77).

based in Taipei. Sun Shengwu 孫繩武 (1896–1975), a key founder of the Chinese Muslim Association during WWII, had led the 1963 pilgrimage delegation from Taipei and conversed with the WML's secretary-general Mohammed Surūr al-Ṣabān on the necessity of having representation from the Republic of China in the League. From then on Sun Shengwu served as a member of the WML's Constituent Council (composed of twenty-one members at the time) for fourteen years (1963–1975), before being replaced by Ding Zhongming (定仲明 1913–?), who represented China in the World Muslim League's Constituent Council and World Supreme Council for Mosques between 1982 and 1997.<sup>17</sup>

Ironically, the contentions over the issue of East Turkistan in the World Muslim League revealed the divisions among Chinese Muslim dignitaries in Taipei, each of whom had utilized outside connections to further their positions at home. When the memorandum on East Turkistan's independence was passed, Xiao Yongtai 蕭永泰 (1919–90) submitted a report to Taipei's ministry of foreign affairs accusing his competitor Sun Shengwu, then the representative of the Republic of China in the World Muslim League, of forfeiting sovereignty of China in an international Islamic platform. Xiao Yongtai, who had been a member of the aforementioned Yulbars Khan's pilgrimage delegation in 1954, was a young imam from Rehe in northeastern China who had escaped to Taiwan. As he faced conflicted relations with the personnel at the Chinese Muslim Association in the Taipei Grand Mosque, Xiao Yongtai established his own Culture Mosque (1951) and the Chinese Muslim Youth League (1956), which published fiercely anticommunist articles in its periodicals. Simultaneously, in place of the strong international contacts that the Chinese Muslim Association developed through its robust relations with the Republican state, Xiao Yongtai sought to forge his own transnational connections with the Ahmadiyya movement, and an anticommunist front with the Tatar and Turkistani descendants in Japan (Cieciura 2018, 147–48).

A decade later, after his initial pilgrimage missions in 1954, Xiao Yongtai managed to come back as the leader of the 1965 pilgrimage missions. He was, however, consistently blocked in transit points of Hong Kong and Beirut by affiliates of the ROC's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and even detained at the Jeddah airport by customs officers. The charges against Xiao Yongtai, passed down from the World Muslim League, were that he was a supporter

17 Ding Zhongming was a graduate of Shanghai's Xiao Taoyuan mosque and al-Azhar University who throughout the 50s and 60s had circulated around diplomatic agencies in Lebanon, Mauritania, and Libya. With Ma Bufang's pilgrimage delegation in 1956 as a start, he was a part of four more pilgrimage delegations as a leader (1967, 1973, 1979, 1985).

of the Ahmadiyya movement that had been classified as heretical in Saudi Arabia. This was since he had attended an Ahmadiyya gathering in Pakistan several months earlier. In his defense, Xiao Yongtai pointed out that the visit to Pakistan had been undertaken under the name of the Republic of China's Islamic friendship delegation (*Zhonghua minguo huijiao youhao fangwentuan* 中華民國回教友好訪問團) ("Huijiao Renshi Sun Shengwu Yu Xiao Yongtai" 1966, 0011). His participation had been approved by the central government, and the visit's significance for politics and interests of the country superseded that of religion (*qi zhengzhi yiyi ji guojia liyi chaoguo zongjiao* 其政治意義及國家利益超過宗教) ("Huijiao Renshi Sun Shengwu Yu Xiao Yongtai" 1966, 0011).

What angered Xiao Yongtai even more was that the charges against him were made by Sun Shengwu, who had assumed the position of a Council member at the World Muslim League a year before. As a member of the World Muslim League Council, Sun had accused Xiao Yongtai of being an adherent of the "heretic" (*xiejiao* 邪教) Ahmadiyya sect that was outlawed by Saudi religious authorities ("Huijiao Renshi Sun Shengwu Yu Xiao Yongtai" 1966, 0015). The charge led both Sun Shengwu and Xiao Yongtai to the office of the World Muslim League's vice secretary and the court, accompanied by the embassy's secretary 'Uthman Lin Xingzhi who acted as a translator. The conversation proceeded thus:

- Judge: Have you been a Muslim originally?  
 Xiao Yongtai: Our family has been Muslims for generations. As for myself, I have received religious education since I was young, and have studied the Quran assiduously. Now I am an Imam in China. We have propagated the religion for twenty generations.
- Judge: Have you come for the pilgrimage before?  
 Xiao Yongtai: I have come for the pilgrimage once, eleven years ago.
- Judge: At the time, were you a member or the leader?  
 Xiao Yongtai: I was a member.
- Judge: Do you have an understanding of Pakistan's Ahmadiyya?  
 Xiao Yongtai: I understand it very well; the Ahmadiyya sect has long departed from interpretations of the Prophet and Sunni sect. Islam calls the Ahmadiyya sect *kafir* (unbelievers) ("Huijiao Renshi Sun Shengwu Yu Xiao Yongtai" 1966, 0013).

At Xiao's response, the judge added that although Ahmadiyya also believes that Muhammad is God's messenger they also value "another person" ("Muslim Dignitaries Sun Shengwu and Xiao Yongtai" 1966, 0013). He urged Xiao

Yongtai to avoid interactions if he ran into one of them, and to sign a piece of paper in that regard. Sun Shengwu who had been with them according to Xiao Yongtai “used all measures to stir trouble” (“Huijiao Renshi Sun Shengwu Yu Xiao Yongtai” 1966, 0013). In front of “the foreigners” (*yangren-mianqian* 洋人面前), he asked Xiao Yongtai to acknowledge that he had been an Ahmadiyya follower in the past but now changed his mind, and to swear not to spread Ahmadiyya again. Xiao Yongtai, no longer able to hold back his indignation, said to Sun Shengwu, “even the judge is not making me swear an oath, and has not even asked whether I am an Ahmadiyya or not. So why are you being so headstrong like this?” (“Muslim Dignitaries Sun Shengwu and Xiao Yongtai” 1966, 0013). The judge, in any case, had both persons sign the document; the document was also signed by ‘Uthman Lin Xingzhi and two Saudi dignitaries (“Huijiao Renshi Sun Shengwu Yu Xiao Yongtai” 1966, 0013). Later, Xiao Yongtai described his warm encounter in Mecca with the Secretary of the World Muslim League, Mohammad Surūr al-Sabān, through the reluctant mediation of ‘Uthman Lin Xingzhi. Prompted to say whether he had anything to say about accusations that Sun Shengwu had made against him, Xiao Yongtai, in consideration of the country’s honor (*wei weihu guojia yun* 為維護國家譽), reportedly replied that everything about the debacle had been a misunderstanding (“Huijiao Renshi Sun Shengwu Yu Xiao Yongtai” 1966, 0015).

Upon returning from Mecca, Xiao Yongtai submitted a report that accused Sun Shengwu of personally defaming him through his fabricated scheme, and moreover, of “humiliatingly forfeiting our country’s sovereignty” in an outer arena (*zai wai sangquanruguo* 在外喪權辱國). Throughout the report, Xiao Yongtai consistently criticized Sun Shengwu for disregarding the reputation and “face of the country” (*guojia timian* 國家體面) by openly showing divisions within the group in front of foreign personalities in high positions, in contrast to himself who held himself back and smiled all along (“Huijiao Renshi Sun Shengwu Yu Xiao Yongtai” 1966, 0014). Moreover, Xiao Yongtai reported how Sun, as a Council member of the World Muslim League, remained silent in the face of movements for East Turkistan’s independence that unfolded through the League. To Xiao Yongtai’s surprise, the flag of the Republic of China did not hang at the inauguration ceremony of the World Muslim League that was held after the pilgrimage. Although the embassy sent another flag the next day, the ceremony had ended by then. According to Xiao Yongtai, the flag that had been initially sent to and checked by the secretariat was reported to have been damaged by a “Xinjiang independence movement element” who was an employee in the secretariat (“Huijiao Renshi Sun Shengwu Yu Xiao Yongtai” 1966, 0015). But Sun Shengwu did not

protest. Moreover, when a memorandum that supported the independence of Xinjiang was passed in a committee meeting before the closing of the conference, “our representative” Sun Shengwu “remained silent,” thereby expressing his tacit agreement by “not saying a word” (“Huijiao Renshi Sun Shengwu Yu Xiao Yongtai” 1966, 0015). Xiao Yongtai claimed this indicated his intention of “promoting his personal interests and keeping his position as a Council member at the World Muslim League” (“Huijiao Renshi Sun Shengwu Yu Xiao Yongtai” 1966, 0015).

In his defense, Sun Shengwu wrote on the designation of Ahmadiyya as a heretical sect in Saudi Arabia, a country critical to Taiwan’s interests. According to Sun, even before he himself raised the issue, the secretary-general of the World Muslim League asked him about an Ahmadiyya follower in Taiwan’s delegation. Sun also explicated his utmost attempts to prevent the spread of the East Turkistan independence movement in the WML; he directed the issue to be presented at a smaller meeting rather than the general conference, on the grounds that this was a political rather than a religious issue, and that the World Muslim League was not to be involved in political matters (“Huijiao Renshi Sun Shengwu Yu Xiao Yongtai” 1966, 0016-0030). He also blocked the resolution from being implemented through personal protests.

Attempts by Sun Shengwu to further Republican China’s claims to Xinjiang, however, seem to have further galvanized public figures among Turkistani diasporas to raise awareness about the autonomous culture and history of East Turkistan towards internal and outside audiences through narrative productions. Sun Shengwu is remembered by the elderly among the Turkistani community as a representative of the ROC who arrived with a historian who falsely denied the presence of the autonomous history of East Turkistan. To counter his position that represented the Republican state, Turkistani leaders issued a booklet in 1964 entitled *A Letter to the Islamic World... Truths about Muslim Turkistan* [risāla ila al-‘ālam al-islāmī... haqā’iq ‘an al-turkistān al-muslima], with monetary support from the community in Saudi Arabia. Five thousand copies were circulated throughout the world. It was also published in various newspapers, including *al-Da’wah* in Riyadh, *al-Nadwah* in Mecca, *al-Bilād* in Jeddah, and the magazine *al-Manhal*; an English-translated version was printed in the magazine *al-Hajj* published by the Ministry for Hajj and Awqāf in Mecca.<sup>18</sup>

18 Rahmat Allah ‘Unāyat Allah (رحمة الله عنابة الله), “al-Mujāhid Wa al-Munāḍil al-Turkistāni ... Muhammad Amīn Islāmī (A Turkistani Mujahid, Fighter... Muhammad Amin Islami و المجاهد و المناضل التركستاني... محمد أمين اسلامي).” For the booklet: Muhammad Amīn al-Islāmī Turkistāni, *Haqā’iq ‘an al-Turkistān al-Muslimah* (حقائق عن التركستان المسلمة) (Jeddah: al-Mu’sasa al-‘Arabīyya al-ṭibā’ah, 1964).

As a focal point where states and diasporas assembled, Mecca thus offered not only a refuge for escapees from Xinjiang and elsewhere in Central Asia, but a space for Turkistani political activists to mobilize rhetorical and material support for a state that was composed of dispersed networks rather than a bounded territory and people. In this respect, the World Muslim League that endorsed them carried the capacity to engage with entities that were not necessarily recognized as full states in the international arena. The contentions over East Turkistan that were recorded in Taipei's archives also revealed the divisiveness within Taipei's Muslim dignitaries who nevertheless emphasized their unity outwardly. The idea of universalist Islam, and the convergence of Muslim networks in Mecca that the World Muslim League institutionalized, provided sets of tools for competing groups of Chinese and Turkic Muslim religiopolitical figures to portray themselves as a unified group, arrange journeys, and reorganize their religious, political and inter-personal networks from their new bases outside mainland China.

## Conclusion

This chapter shows multiple layers of diplomatic networks between Mecca, Taipei, and beyond that realigned through the Cold War. Along Cold War axes in East and West Asia, religious delegates of Taiwan, East Turkistan, and, briefly, the PRC made inroads to Mecca with the agenda of forging alliances with state representatives gathered during the pilgrimage season and undertaking propaganda through the rhetoric of Islamic solidarity. The audience included not only the imagined body of the global Muslim community but transregional diaspora societies. Mecca thus represented a hub where writers and diplomatic notables with contesting claims could reassemble and strengthen religiopolitical networks through speeches and writings, and simultaneously elevate their standing within their respective diaspora societies.

By juxtaposing the distant place of Mecca with Taipei and uncovering the interconnections between the two cities, I sought to reposition Taipei within the wider Islamic geographies across Asia, uncover two-directional travels, and dissect layers of contestations within. Muslim communities in Taipei and their spaces of gathering were part of the transregional nexus that exceeded the scope of East Asia. At the same time, delving into conflicts between individuals with divergent interests and backgrounds revealed that the idea of anticommunist Islamic unity that provided rhetorical and material support for Islamic communities and institutions in Taipei should not be

interpreted at face value as an all-encompassing concept that automatically attracted followers, but represented an idiom that competing parties could strategically draw on within the ROC, and well beyond its borders.

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## About the Author

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# **Part 2**

Hong Kong



## 6. The Heart of the Berlin of the East: Victoria Park, Queen's College, and Causeway Bay in Cold War Hong Kong

*Brian Tsui and Joseph Gregory Yu*

**Abstract:** This chapter explores the relocation of the Queen Victoria statue and Queen's College to Causeway Bay in the 1950s, when the Cold War fully embedded itself across Asia. The authors argue that the placement of two important symbols of British rule outside the city's ceremonial and administrative heart allegorized the colonial state's desire to win hearts and minds among the local Chinese population. With Britain's declining power and America's rise as Asia's primary hegemon, the colonial state hedged its survival on transforming Hong Kong into a haven of capitalism and consumerism. Causeway Bay became the core site of this experiment. The creation of Victoria Park on reclaimed land and the placement of Queen's College in Causeway Bay turned the district into a prime commercial and residential area well-sought after by aspirational Chinese inhabitants.

**Keywords:** colonial symbols, Causeway Bay, capitalism, Victoria Park, Queen's College

### Introduction

When Victoria Park was opened to the public in 1955, it was by far the largest facility of its kind in Hong Kong. Named after Queen Victoria, to whom Qing China ceded the territory, the park has also been the home of a statue of the British monarch since 1955. The relocation of the Queen Victoria statue to Causeway Bay relegated the most potent symbol of imperial might to a cavernous, peripheral part of Hong Kong. During the 1950s, as the rest of the

British Empire was falling apart, the United Kingdom maintained precarious control over its colony off the shore of southern China. The reconfiguration of Hong Kong's cityscape was overshadowed by the British Empire's eclipse and the colony's repositioning from trade entrepôt connecting China and the West to an export and tourism-oriented economy. The United States, rather than Britain, underwrote the colony's economic survival and defense against any takeover attempt by the People's Liberation Army. Washington's deep involvement in Hong Kong was such that affairs in the colony constituted an important dimension of its postwar "special relationship" with London (Mark 2004, 3). The fact that colonial symbols and institutions were concentrated in postwar Causeway Bay, part of which was reclaimed in the 1950s, was symptomatic of and reinforced the Cold War reconfiguration of Britain's precarious imperial reach in East Asia.

Victoria Park and the Queen Victoria statue joined the new Queen's College campus in highlighting the monarchical symbolism of Causeway Bay. Founded in 1862, Queen's College was the first government-run secondary school catering to the Chinese and Eurasian populations. The college occupied sites on Gough Street and Aberdeen Street, both well within the City of Victoria. The prewar Queen's College was not at the heart of the colony's administrative and ceremonial heart, where Statue Square was surrounded by the colony's highest court, city hall, the Anglican cathedral, the men's-only Hong Kong Club, and the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank. For much of Hong Kong's history, these institutions were run by British colonialists. Queen's College was located instead in the same Chinese-populated neighborhood as that of the College of Medicine (absorbed into the University of Hong Kong in 1910); both institutions drew most of their students from Chinese residents and contributed to the making of the local Chinese elite. The postwar relocation of Queen's College was followed by the placement of Queen Victoria's statue on the periphery of Hong Kong Island—i.e., Causeway Bay—which developed into a center of the colony's consumerist capitalism. In this chapter we trace how the spatial arrangements of Queen's College and Victoria Park allegorized the evolution of the colonial state's designs for itself and its relationship with Hong Kong and its Chinese-dominated population under the Cold War order. We highlight how Causeway Bay embodied the ways in which the aspirations of a diminishing British empire and those of the ascendant local Chinese in Hong Kong interacted and coalesced.

The areas surrounding Causeway Bay were far from barren in the first half of the twentieth century. The eastern extent of the City of Victoria, known as East Point, had housed warehouses and a sugar refinery operated by British conglomerates Jardine Matheson and John Swire & Sons respectively.

Further east, the Queen's Recreation Ground stood along the coast south of the tram track. Various bodies vied to get their hands on the pie that was the open Causeway Bay. For example, the Bishop of Victoria, Ronald Hall, pleaded to the colonial government in 1937 for a piece of land there as the new site of the Anglican boys' school St. Paul's College (HKRS 58-1-184-9 I.L. 76). Yet, there is little doubt that the neighborhood's rapid development took place after WWII under state auspices. The Hong Kong government's advisor, renowned town planner Patrick Abercrombie, earmarked Causeway Bay for heavy industries. Colonial officials had something else in mind (Ho 2018, 168). Their first major intervention was to bring Queen's College to Causeway Bay in 1950, moving the premier secondary school for locals from the west of Hong Kong Island to the expanding east. A much more transformative initiative was the 1953 reclamation of the typhoon shelter, which was moved northwards. The reclaimed land became the colony's largest urban park and, eventually, part of the colony's most prosperous postwar commercial area aligned with Cold War capitalism.

As far as Hong Kong's urban landscape is concerned, the state has always played a defining role. The government owned all land under which it governs, except for a small plot where St. John's Cathedral stood. As the only body in the colony empowered to grant leases to commercial bodies and civil organizations alike, the government held immense sway in sculpting the city's spatial configurations. Spatial ordering, in turn, reinforced the authority of the colonial state. Social space, as far as Henri Lefebvre (2009, 224-25) is concerned, is a hierarchy the state constructs and maintains through architectural arrangements. Buildings, monuments and public spaces imparted on the populace, many of whom otherwise did not interact with government officials regularly, the social order over which the colonial state presided. They naturalized power and made it part of the people's everyday life.

In the 1950s, the colonial state focused less on perpetuating its authority than restoring it. The weak resistance British colonialists offered to Japanese invaders in 1941 dented their credibility. After the war, the British faced down Nationalist China's demand for the colony's retrocession, only to be confronted by the challenge of a fervently anticolonial Communist government across the Shenzhen River. The local Chinese population and particularly refugees fleeing the civil war in mainland China were not anti-British. Yet, the most blatant discriminatory measures—prohibiting the Chinese from living on the Peak, for example—had to go (Carroll 2007, 130). The city's hearts and minds had to be won over, or at least not antagonized, if the colonial order were to survive.

The Cold War's onset in Asia complicated the state's goal to shore up its legitimacy and secure its grip on the colony. The first postwar governor Mark Young's reform plan, which would have given the residents limited self-government by devolving powers to an elected municipal council, was shelved when Alexander Grantham took over in 1947. Cold War considerations undergirded Grantham's decade-long, "highly conservative" administration that considered political and social reforms anathema (Goodstadt 2004, 70). Yet, Grantham's most long-lasting impact on the colony's subsequent developments grew out from his take on geopolitics. Unlike Young's intention to lay the groundwork for Hong Kong as a self-governing community under an imperial power in retreat, Grantham was intent on pitching the city as the Berlin of the East, as "a living example for the Chinese of a free life" that would resonate in China and Southeast Asia. Hong Kong was not just a remnant of the British Empire in Asia, one that London was incapable to defend militarily. It was a bastion of the Free World against communism on the doorstep of Red China (Roberts 2016, 37–38). The results were a polity under which the state provided little social welfare and an economy relying on light and service industries, both beholden to the United States as the new hegemon of Asia. Export, banking, and tourism—all targeting the burgeoning American market—replaced *entrepôt* business as mainland China was sealed off from the Western bloc with the onset of the Korean War. Instead of deepening links—movement of goods, capital, and people—with colonial outposts, let alone other Chinese cities, trans-Pacific ties became paramount for an industrializing, export-oriented economy. The most striking spatial manifestation of Hong Kong's new position was the extended runway of the Kai Tak Airport, an attempt on the state's part to outmaneuver potential competitors such as Manila (Ho 2018, 198) in enhancing freight and passenger airline services with the United States.

If the airport runway signaled the Hong Kong economy's reorientation from mainland China and the British Empire to the US-dominated Asia-Pacific, Causeway Bay's expansion signified the colonial state's investment in this new order and engagement of public enthusiasm in it. The placement of Queen's College and the Queen Victoria Statue, two potent symbols of British rule respectively destroyed and removed during the war with Japan, displayed not only the eastward expansion of the colony's core area but also belied the state's new postwar/Cold War self-image. The state presented itself as an apolitical, agile, and rational facilitator of a fast-growing industrial, urban society with an ethnic Chinese majority, keen to provide spaces for recreation and education, however limited in capacity, a free society desired.

## Functionality and Statements of Power—Modernist Architecture in Postwar Hong Kong

Both hallmarks departed from their prewar incarnations in design and the spatial contexts in which they were put, highlighting new modes of colonial governance as Hong Kong settled into its position in the wider geopolitical configurations. The two-story Causeway Bay campus of Queen's College was put up in a few months. Lacking exterior ornaments or flourishes, the modernist architectural form that gave shape to the secondary school prized functionality, minimalism, and standardization. It tapped into interwar optimism over the liberating potential of the industrial age and was much detested by rightwing regimes in continental Europe and elsewhere for its inability to inspire nationalism. Modernism in architecture came into vogue during the Cold War for both financial and ideological reasons. In West Berlin, the adoption of an aesthetics suppressed under the ultranationalist Third Reich made economic sense for postwar construction and projected the image of a capitalist, international, and free city at the doorstep of the Communist bloc (Kam 2022, 31). In Hong Kong, modernist architecture—cost effective, mass produced, and requiring little artistic genius—was embraced as much for its practicality as its ideological attributes. Its propensity to easy, generic reproduction explained its popularity among architects serving the government and in the private sector; the colony struggled to house an influx of refugees from the north (Xue 2016). The Queen's College campus in Causeway Bay was one of the earliest postwar public buildings. It was designed by the Architectural Office of the Public Works Department—a well-staffed arm of the colonial government—which was responsible for designing schools, markets, residential buildings, and government offices. In the 1950s, the Architectural Office employed expatriate and a few Chinese emigrant architects. Its oeuvre was characterized by modernism adapted to Hong Kong's subtropical climate. Rooms that opened to balconies, sun shading devices, and perforated screen walls—concessions to the colony's sweltering summer—became *de rigueur* for school buildings that government architects designed (Koditek 2022, 310). Queen's College was a prototype of many campuses that sprouted up across the putative Berlin of the East.

Like much modernist architecture, Queen's College was modest and austere in both scale and aesthetics. Its design was very different from the neoclassical grandiosity that the college, situated close to Central, embodied in its prewar days. Yet, modernist architecture did not preclude the display of state power. Despite its understated appearance and appeal to universality,

this form of architecture still enshrined hierarchy and colonial prowess. In terms of aesthetics, the Edinburgh Place Complex, which included the City Hall and the now demolished Queen's Pier, referenced neither Hong Kong's British master nor its Chinese heritage. Its international form, however, was accompanied by an axial spatial arrangement that put on full display colonial hierarchy (Kam 2022, 32). It was therefore not surprising that the ceremonial heart of the colony had very much shifted to Edinburgh Place, where imperial pageantry was on show. Incoming governors ascended to the shore on Queen's Pier. They would then inspect the ceremonial guard before taking the oath of office in City Hall. Visiting British royals likewise landed on the city through the pier. The axial connection between the pier, the public square and the city hall gave ceremonial heist to colonial figures. In settings such as Queen's College, the placement of cannons lends to the impression, even if unstated, of the colonial state's determination to defend Hong Kong from alleged Chinese Communist aggression. Such a message was reinforced by the continual operation of the Causeway Bay Camp, where the British forces held exercises, to the west of the college.

### Causeway Bay and Its Many Victorias

Queen's College's relocation was significant but hardly the most consequential in terms of the postwar geographical remaking of Hong Kong Island. A public park, the largest in the colony, was earmarked in Causeway Bay. Like Kai Tak Airport's new runway and Edinburgh Place, the park was built on reclaimed land. Yet, unlike the runway, which was geared towards tourism and international trade, the other two facilities were public spaces and acquired symbolic significances. Edinburgh Place was home to the new City Hall, which was inaugurated in 1962 with a memorial shrine honoring those who perished defending Hong Kong against the Japanese. Victoria Park, like Queen's College, paid homage to the British monarch to whom Hong Kong Island was ceded and hosted a statue of the queen. The only other public space in postwar Hong Kong that hosted a British royal's sculpture—that of King George VI, erected in 1958—was the botanical gardens. As social spaces, city halls and urban parks were apparatuses that the state deployed to mold, discipline, and interact with its subjects. Across the British Empire, parks, schools, libraries, and performance spaces had since the late nineteenth century constituted a trans-imperial bourgeois public sphere, populated mostly by white (and male) officials and professionals who aspired to ways of life they left behind in the metropole. Elite individuals of the Indigenous

population gradually gained admission to this exclusive domain (Mackenzie, 124–26). In postwar Hong Kong, where racial and gender exclusivity was increasingly frowned upon, these new government-run facilities explicitly catered to the burgeoning Chinese population. Young people who might be susceptible to propaganda from the north could be attracted instead to the freedoms and material abundance the British were supposed to offer. The actual circumstances that bestowed Victoria Park its name and the Queen Victoria statue were, yet, filled with contingencies. The result, however, was no less an emphatic assertion of British rule over its colony, albeit belying the state's interest in facilitating the service and real estate industries that involved mostly Chinese residents.

There were disagreements over how the largest public park in the colony should be named, although honoring a British monarch was the consensus within the establishment. A desire to imprint British authority onto the expanded urban space by leveraging sovereigns, past or present, was apparent. Three proposals were put forth. The park in Causeway Bay could take the name of the recently deceased George VI or his daughter-cum-reigning queen Elizabeth II. George VI, who died in February 1952, was the most straightforward solution. However, honoring the late king was considered confusing since parks had already been named to memorialize his father George V; the local populace would struggle to distinguish the V from the VI among the Georges. George VI's name could, instead, grace a new hospital on the Kowloon Peninsula. As it turned out, that hospital, hailed as the largest in the Commonwealth when it began service in 1963, was named after Elizabeth II. Her youth was fitting for a facility that included a substantial children's wing. The name "Victoria Park," which the Urban Council endorsed, was discussed in communications among senior officials for its "uninspired association," as the name could refer to either the statue or the City of Victoria (HKRS 156-1-2563-2). As such, two significant changes to Hong Kong's postwar cityscape that citizens encountered on an everyday basis were named after two iconic female sovereigns—one who "founded" the city and the other reigning—underscoring Britain's commitment to its sole East Asian colony.

Rather than a carefully calibrated statement, placing the most potent symbol of British rule—the statue of Queen Victoria—in the new park represented a marriage of convenience. Yet, the statue's new location did aptly put to relief Grantham's reinvention of the colonial state as a facilitator of capitalist economic development. Unlike the bronze figure's location in Victoria Park, her likeness used to occupy a main place in the colony. Covered by a canopy, it stood on Statue Square overlooking the Cenotaph, the Supreme

Court, and, until 1933, City Hall. The statue's central location and position relative to ceremonial and governmental spaces within the colonial city was typical across the British Empire. So was the monarch's association with what used to be "bourgeois spaces" such as museums, theaters, and libraries that town halls housed. From Kolkata to Ottawa, Madras to Yangon, erecting a Queen Victoria statue or naming facilities on her jubilee occasion marked the apex of the city's development under colonial rule (Mackenzie 2020, 93, 130, 238, 270). The anomaly in Hong Kong was that the bronze structure was unceremoniously removed by the Japanese occupiers. In the statue's place occupied an inscription of Governor Isogai Rensuke's proclamation celebrating Japanese rule. By 1951, the recovered statue was "languishing in a yard in Wanchai used by the Water Works" (HKRS 337-3-1). Such location was obviously unbecoming for her august majesty and an embarrassment for a state that wished to project authority on the urban scene.

The reinstalment of the statue turned out to represent the colonialists' struggle to reassert their authority onto a rapidly transformed cityscape. The most straightforward solution was to return it to Statue Square, where the sculpture had sat since 1896 until the Japanese occupation. Yet, the square, as if allegorizing the diminished scale of imperial might, was a shadow of its former self. Statues depicting British royals—Edward VII, George V and their consorts—that used to surround Victoria's were missing, leaving behind bare pedestals. Visualizing the shift of power in a city increasingly dependent on economic development, the only statue that remained intact was that of Hongkong and Shanghai Bank tycoon Thomas Jackson (HKRS 337-3-1, 35), which still stands today. Given the decrepit state of the space, it is not difficult to appreciate why the Secretary of Chinese Affairs' 1946 suggestion that Statue Square be revamped did not gain much traction. His executive council colleague Thomas Hazlerigg did not think public funds should go to reviving "a collection of monuments which did little (or anything) to add either beauty or dignity to the square" (HKRS 337-3-1, 60). Bringing the statue to the Botanical Gardens was another option. Yet, the low elevation would render the installation "a convenient center for Himalayan expeditions for children" (HKRS 337-3-1, 11). Instead, a George VI statue was placed in 1958. The third proposal was to place the statue outside the newly constructed Alexandra House (HKRS 337-3-1, 24), an office building in Central. That Victoria's likeness would be dwarfed by high-rises and the lack of protective railings were cited as one reason for the idea's unsuitability.

Indeed, as the center of Victoria City became increasingly filled with office blocks, giving way to a commercializing urban space, and identifying

other locations in the colony seemed inevitable if imperial monumentality, however much diminished, was to be displayed. Not only had the original city hall been demolished before the war, clearing the way for the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank headquarters, with its former tycoon's representation the only statue left on the public square as the art deco building towered behind. It was therefore unsurprising that the rediscovered Victoria—described by the artisan commissioned for its repair to be “in very bad condition” with the crown, specter, earrings, and other parts missing (HKRS 337-3-1, 50)—should find home in the new Causeway Bay Park. As Douglas Smart, a partner of the prominent architectural firm Palmer & Turner and a member of the government-formed Fine Arts Committee, argued, the statue “should be positioned at the end of an avenue or broad pathway flanked with trees or grass verges hereby forming the terminal feature of a vista” (HKRS-337-3-1, 47). This arrangement was only possible in the blank canvass that was Causeway Bay. Of course, such a location was not welcome by everyone. Victoria Park referred to the City of Victoria and not to the monarch. Some readers of the *South China Morning Post* were not impressed. Letters complained of the statue being “banish[ed]” and “relegated to the obscurity of the Causeway Bay mud-flat” (HKRS-337-3-1, 41).

Colonial bureaucrats decided, though not without their own concerns, that the Queen Victoria statue had to go to Causeway Bay. The new park was a tabula rasa, with no commercial or other competing interests clamoring for space. Measures, a 1955 internal memo warned (HKRS 156-1-2563-2: 17), should be made against “any ill-intentioned person” who could inflict “indignity” onto the statue. Much more serious than innocuous juvenile abuses, officials obviously had in mind citizens who vandalized the installation to send messages, including those that were overtly political. Victoria Park would have enough room to stand the statue on a pedestal higher than a normal human being, making it safer from mischief. In any case, the space between playgrounds needed “some decorative motif”; a Chinese banyan could certainly give way for a representation of her majesty (HKRS 337-3-1, 11).

### **State-Capital—Victoria Park Boosting Real Estate Developments**

This appropriation, if unwittingly, of the Victoria statue belied the state's imperative to promote the circulation of capital and population. Remaking urban spaces was the most effective way for a modern state to channel commercial activities, real estate investments, and the settlement and displacement of people. What the colonial state did in Causeway Bay cannot

be compared in scale with Paris, which David Harvey (2003) characterized as the “capital of modernity.” In the nineteenth century, the French capital underwent a process of gentrification under the Haussmann plan, under which the property market in the city center received a significant boost at the expense of the working class who were driven away by the wide and well-planted boulevards. Causeway Bay was no doubt not developed on the French capital’s scale. Yet, the colonial state’s spatial ordering of Causeway Bay proved to be a great boost to the real estate and tourism industries. One reason why the government decided to go against the Abercrombie Plan and enhance Causeway Bay as a residential area was to entice the population to move east and away from the City of Victoria (Ho 2018, 168–69).

With the inflow of affluent residents came that of capital. Adorned with the colony’s premier secondary school and largest public park, Causeway Bay became prime estate, drawing in an aspirant bourgeoisie who craved the lifestyle of the Chinese elite. The desire to emulate the leisure class was projected to Victoria Park. The public park, *Kung Sheung Evening News* (“Weiduoliya gongyuan qinglü” 1959) extolled, was just “a little less endowed than private clubs for those seeking recreation and sports, with its many facilities including tennis courts, swimming pools and skating rinks.” In the sizzling summer, young couples enjoyed themselves on the slopes, taking a break from their steaming apartments. They could imagine themselves partaking in the trans-imperial bourgeois spaces to which entry remained prohibitive for most. The Chinese Recreation Club, an exclusive member-based venue modelled on colonial gentlemen’s clubs (many of which, in turn, did not welcome Chinese people), was just a stone’s throw away from Victoria Park and Queen’s College. Aside from rubbing shoulders with members of respectable society, residents would gradually find in their neighborhood a consumerist mecca. Victoria Park’s western limit was close to the better-developed part of Causeway Bay, served by hotels such as Cathay, Waldorf, and Sunning House. Media reports suggested that the new park attracted investments on its eastern end, with a fifteen-story Victoria Park Hotel designed by the famed Canadian architect John B. Parkin (“Jia’nada gongchengshi” 1958; “Weiduoliya gongyuan jiudian” 1959). Unlike the Queen Victoria statue’s original location or its proposed new home at the Botanical Gardens, Causeway Bay was the colony’s new commercial and tourism heart, with its typhoon shelter, junks serving seafood, gaudy theme park Tiger Balm Garden, and the nearby Wan Chai area where US naval service personnel would arrive at the city for R&R (rest and recuperation) as Washington’s military adventures in Korea and Vietnam gathered steam.

As an embodiment of Causeway Bay's transformation into a thriving core of Hong Kong Island, Victoria Park was unsurprisingly a boost to the real estate market in the area. Newspaper advertisements showcased ample new developments around the urban green space. Two apartment blocks on Paterson Street, Hyde Park (Haide 海德) and Fairview (Hua'er 華爾), were completed in August 1958 ("Tongluowan Baidexinjie" 1958, 12). Apartments at Welcome (Huaxia 華廈) became available on the market in the same month ("Huaxia kaishi" 1958, 7). These developments were billed as being adjacent to Victoria Park and overlooking the harbor. They took foreign-sounding English names and carried "mansion" in their titles, lending them a sense of grandeur and exoticism. On the other end of the park, the tentative Triumph Court (Kaixuan dasha 凱旋大廈) was reported as located just across from "the most famed garden in Hong Kong and Kowloon, with swimming pools, sports grounds and amenities for urbanites" ("Weiduoliya gongyuan ce" 1958, 12). Those three developments, all promising spacious apartments relative to a cramped city in just one month, attest to Victoria Park's ability to produce spaces for an ascendant local bourgeoisie with the resources to invest in the capitalist paradise.

### Causeway Bay as the New Face of Colonial Rule

Unlike Statue Square or Edinburgh Place, Causeway Bay displayed most vividly the new *raison d'état* of the postwar Hong Kong state—i.e., to serve as an example of a free, entrepreneurial city with a distinct, attractive lifestyle on the doorstep of Communist China. In this sense, the many allusions to Queen Victoria in the area, though unintended, were fitting symbols of the colony's Cold War socioeconomic landscape. Statue Square remained the ceremonial heart of hard colonial power. Before Japanese occupation, the review of the troops took place in that space ("Yinghuang shengchen" 1934, 3). This practice was revived in the 1950s, even though the Queen Victoria statue was never returned to its former site. On 16 September 1951, the colonial governor reviewed the Hong Kong air force beside the Cenotaph before joining other officials for a service at St. John's Cathedral uphill. The occasion marked the 1940 Battle of Britain, during which London and other British cities were raided by Nazi Germany during the summer. This event included a display of the fighter jet Vampire, a specimen of which flew across the harbor facing the Cenotaph. That a weapon that would figure prominently in the Suez Crisis and Malayan Emergency—the latter led by ethnic Chinese communists—was displayed in action for Hong Kong

subjects suggested not only Britain's military might but also its commitment to keep what remained of its empire in Asia from the "wrong" kind of Chinese. The same rituals were repeated in 1953, when commemoration of the Battle of Britain lasted an entire week ("Dabuliedian kongzhan jinian" 1953, 6). The status quo ante—as if Japan's occupation, China's transformation into a major power, the 1949 Communist Revolution, and demise of the British Raj never happened—resurfaced in Central. With Edinburgh Place, the modernist City Hall and the new Queen's Pier, the ceremonial space for display of colonial monumentality was restored, albeit without Victoria's likeness.

Causeway Bay, in contrast, saw another side of the postwar colonial state. It played an apolitical facilitator of urban and commercial life, helping Hong Kong and its Chinese-majority population live up to its carefully cultivated image of a vibrant, free city, in contrast to Communist-controlled China. In addition to the review of troops and highlighting of military hardware, the 1953 commemorations of the Battle of Britain also featured screenings of the war film *Appointment in London* telling the story of a British wing commander's resistance against German invaders and romance with an American widow. Along with the Great World Theatre (Da shijie xiyuan 大世界戲院) in Mong Kok, which opened in 1952 and just in time for the festivities, the film was shown at the famed Lee Theatre (Li wutai 利舞臺) in Causeway Bay. Hong Kong residents could enjoy the latest British-made film at the colony's most well-appointed cinemas. While Central hosted solemn ceremonies, grandiose military displays, and the pageantry of British royals and the monarch's representative, Causeway Bay offered a glimpse of postwar capitalist society—American-style urban consumerism—that engulfed and eventually de-radicalized continental Europe (de Grazia 2004). In this sense, Victoria Park continued the same ethos as a vehicle of apolitical enjoyment and spectacles. It sported an Olympic-sized swimming and diving pool, novelties in the 1950s. Added to the grand infrastructure were concerts ("Weiduoliya gongyuan zuori" 1957), a coffee shop ("Weiduoliya gongyuan zhaotou" 1957), and diving performances ("Weiduoliya gongyuan zhengfu" 1957). Reminders of colonial authority, apart from the Victoria statue, of course remained. The park hosted police marching performances ("Mingri Weiduoliya gongyuan" 1956; "Weiduoliya gongyuan junjing" 1960) not only to entertain subjects but also to impress upon them the force's efficacy. Further afield, the Causeway Bay Magistracy was set up in 1960 to warn residents not to fall on the wrong side of law and order. Causeway Bay's spatial configuration amply exemplified colonial-cum-Cold War freedom as something to be both enjoyed and feared by the masses.

## Reinventing the Ideological State Apparatus—Relocating Queen’s College

Like building Victoria Park and giving the Queen Victoria statue the prominence of place there, resurrecting Queen’s College not only held symbolic and political significances for Causeway Bay but also reinforced trends in Cold War Hong Kong. If it were not for the colonial state’s desire to assert its custodianship of liberty and freedom, it is doubtful the government-run secondary school would have risen from the ashes in the manner it did—relocated to Causeway Bay, housed in a modernist building, and executed with urgency. Following WWII, Queen’s College resumed in the former Japanese Primary School in 1947—itself a powerful symbol of reoccupation. Initially the reconstruction of Queen’s College was not at the top of the colonial government’s agenda. Despite the exponential increase in demand for education and the apparent lack of the most basic facilities for secondary education at the temporary premises, the colonial government was reluctant to spend money to rebuild Queen’s College. What motivated the government to speed up this process was, from its point of view, the worsening political situation in China. By 1949, the Chinese Communist Party had gained an upper hand and defeated the Nationalist forces in many key battles of the Chinese Civil War. Many in Hong Kong were caught by this fervor: the government estimated that up to ninety schools in Hong Kong at the time were dominated by Chinese Communist influences (Grantham 1953, CO 1023/109, 1). Authorities in both London and Hong Kong became anxious about the spread of communism. Hong Kong’s Director of Education T. R. Rowell declared in a June 1949 conference held in Singapore of education officials across the British Empire that communism must be countered as both a force and a creed. In organizational terms, this meant setting up a special bureau under his department that would work with the secret police to “counter communist education” (Sweeting 1993, 200–208).

While leveraging the repressive state apparatus, as Louis Althusser (1971, 142–48) calls it, strengthening the ideological one was more critical to win hearts and minds. Rebuilding the government’s flagship secondary school was a concrete way to show how the colony could offer, as Rowell’s successor put it, “order and good government, the impartiality of justice, living conditions that are much better” (Crozier 1950, 8–9). It was in this context that the new Queen’s College was rushed to be planned and built. Not surprisingly, Rowell used the same occasion in January 1950 when he promised that the new campus would be “in every way a modern and up-to-date building” (“New Queen’s College” 1950) to play cold warrior. He

told the college's teachers and students, then borrowing a hall of a school located in Central, that the colony's education was based on "British ideals of democracy, reason and liberty." Its aim was to foster among youngsters "a lasting faith in the justice and rightness of our principles ... which govern free countries" against "political indoctrination" from the north ("New Queen's College" 1950). For Rowell, the new Queen's College was not just about one school but safeguarding the "democratic" lifestyle the "Berlin of the East" enjoyed. Instead of merely producing bilingual elites and fueling economic growth, the college had the added responsibility of producing ideal citizens that would protect and further the colony's political philosophy and core values ("Official Opening" 1950). Indeed, retaining the educated in Hong Kong was seen as testament to not only the economic but also the city's political attractiveness for its Chinese population. Grantham complained in 1954 that the high number of school-leavers chose to continue their studies in Guangzhou or Taiwan. While cost was probably one major consideration, the governor suspected that some chose mainland China out of political convictions. He observed that in the recent past, Hong Kong was happy to see young people move across the border for work and study. With heightening Cold War tensions, "both sides are competing vigorously for boys educated in Hong Kong" (Grantham 1954, cited in Sweeting 1993, 153). While graduates from schools such as Queen's College who chose to receive further studies in mainland China were very rare, it was obvious that education became another arena where the battle for hearts and minds was fought.

As a front and vehicle for the colonial state's ideological struggle with the People's Republic up north, Queen's College provided a space for subtle but emphatic display of colonial and Cold War values. Like Edinburgh Place and the City Hall complex, the campus's austere style did not immediately lend itself to spectacles of power. Yet, the Hong Kong government leveraged this blank canvass even before starting the construction of the building to make fluent statements. On 23 May 1950, when Grantham laid the foundation stone for the latest incarnation of the college, he was accompanied by G. C. Evans, the Commander of British Forces in Hong Kong, US consul general Karl Rankin and his French counterpart R. E. Jobez. The military band of the first Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders performed for the occasion, entertaining guests which included major government officials, leading Chinese elites and Queen's College old boys. While the commander represented Hong Kong's military involvement, the American and French consuls represented the heads of Western capitalist powers in the United Nations, from which the People's Republic of China was excluded. This foreign and military presence reaffirmed the importance of not just this ceremonial occasion,

but also how Queen's College—in its new location and reincarnated in modernist form—became an international symbol of democratic education in the Western bloc's enclave of Hong Kong. The Chinese elite embodied the government's core audience and their putative aspirations underwritten by British rule. As the Director of Education pointed out in his speech on the day, the concrete monument was “the symbolic foundation stone on which we can build the educational policy of the future,” one that sought to project to students the British democratic and liberal ideals (“Foundation Stone” 1950). To further this objective, the government held photographic exhibitions depicting school life in England and America at various centers across Hong Kong Island and Kowloon, which were visited by 10,000 children and their teachers (“Inspections Proving” 1950).

## Conclusion

By 1956, the colonial government felt that it had managed the city's transformation into a Cold War outpost so well that its annual report struck a triumphalist tone. It cited an unnamed American journalist who in 1951 called Hong Kong a “dying city” with its dwindling entrepôt trade and burgeoning population. The colony defied such gloomy prediction “due to the expansion of, and a revolution, in its industry,” leveraging the capital and skills of rich Chinese refugees and the labor of their poor compatriots. The cityscape changed drastically as the number of factories between 1948 and 1956 almost tripled and that of workers more than doubled (Hong Kong Government 1960, 11). Causeway Bay, originally designated as an industrial zone, embodied another dimension of the colony's rebranding as the Berlin of the East. As British power in Asia unraveled, Hong Kong's security was dependent on US military might. Domestically, the colonial state needed to win over the local Chinese-majority population, many of whom could be susceptible to messages from across the border. Spatial ordering was one ready tool for the state to shore up its authority, move people around and facilitate the circulation of capital.

As a new, Chinese-majority residential area on the edge of the City of Victoria, Causeway Bay was quickly dotted with public facilities that alluded to Queen Victoria, including a statue of the long-reigning monarch which used to occupy the prime of place in the colony's ceremonial center. Its new and current location, Victoria Park, represented the state's new focus on appealing to the Chinese population, impressing upon them the benefits of the colony as a sanctuary of freedom and liberty on China's doorstep. Building a cavernous and well-equipped urban park and reviving Queen's

College made Causeway Bay into the space onto which the dream of an upwardly mobile, materially comfortable life was projected. Those who had the means could even make such dream a reality by moving into one of the mansions that real estate developers erected in the park's environs.

Despite displaying a softer image, the colonial state never shied away from using urban space to manifest its power. Reviews of troops and military parades before richly ornamented buildings adapted from the metropole were revived. The Cold War context and the need to build structures quickly and at low cost resulted in the wide adoption of the modernist or international style in public architecture. The new campus of Queen's College, which was completed in two months, was one prime example. The façade and austere form, devoid of British or Chinese motifs, suggested a cosmopolitanism fitting for the Western bloc's frontier. Yet, like Edinburgh Place, colonial pageantry could easily be put up to remind subjects of their place. In Causeway Bay, the triangulation of the new face of a diminished British empire, capitalist development, and the wishes of an aspirant Chinese bourgeoisie was complete.

The death of Queen Elizabeth II in 2022, which inspired strong emotions among some Hong Kong residents, has sparked a minor debate on "decolonization" in the city (Lam 2022). For two and a half decades since the end of British rule, Hong Kong's colonial symbols remain: statues of British monarchs remain where they are, street names in homage of colonial officials persist, and institutions bearing the names of British royals stay unchanged. Queen's College retains its name, as does Victoria Park. The legislator who started the debate only proposed to change local laws that refer to "her majesty" or "the crown," a process that was underway in any case. To this date, the decolonization of Hong Kong's cityscape has not gained much traction. Deference to capital in the postcolonial state's urban planning practices arguably still holds. Any changes to Hong Kong's spatial configuration look to be piecemeal and incremental.

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## 7. Pro-Communist Mandarin Cinema in Cold War Hong Kong

*Po-Shek Fu, Qin Yameng, and Man-Fung Yip*

**Abstract:** Colonial Hong Kong was a transregional hub of Cold War ideological confrontation where the United States and its Chinese ally, Chiang Kai-shek's Taiwan, struggled with Beijing for the hearts of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia and around the world. Pro-Communist émigré cinema in the mid-twentieth century was a prime cultural manifestation of this Cold War contest. After an initial period of radicalization and antagonism, the pro-Communist studios in Hong Kong gradually shifted to a moderate approach whose goal was not to undermine British colonial rule or espouse explicit revolutionary ideologies, but to maintain a strategic presence in the local film industry and serve as a point of contact for overseas Chinese. Later, with the rise of two pro-Free China giant studios, Motion Pictures & General Investment Co., Ltd. and Shaw Brothers, the cinematic ecosystem in Hong Kong was significantly changed. In order to hold on to their market presence in an increasingly more competitive environment, pro-Communist film companies embraced a more entertainment-oriented ethos that adhered to popular genre trends, while struggling to remain truthful to their political commitment. With in-depth analysis of two popular films by Zhu Shilin, *The Dividing Wall* (*Yiban zhi ge* 1952) and *Sweet as Honey* (*Tiantian mimi* 1959), the authors seek to historicize the cultural politics of the Beijing-sponsored film establishment in 1950s Hong Kong, focusing in particular on its ambivalent relationships toward entertainment and the colony's postwar cityscape as it negotiated and balanced a changing set of political, ideological, and commercial interests in pursuit of its strategic mission.

**Keywords:** Cold War, patriotic cinema, media ecosystem, entertainment, cityscape

## Introduction

The Cold War between the US and the USSR dominated the international order in the second half of what historian Eric Hobsbawm (1995, 3) suggestively calls the “short twentieth century.” The two superpowers competed for power and influence. They struggled for political, military, and ideological supremacy. In the past two decades, with newly available archival materials, new generations of researchers have produced a rich array of scholarship that brings forth important East and Southeast Asian perspectives that complicate the bipolarity of Cold War historiography. While these works deal largely with high-table diplomacy or military history or regional power politics, in this chapter we bring attention to the cultural dynamics of the Cold War conflicts in British Hong Kong. We focus specifically on the cultural politics of the pro-Communist patriotic Mandarin cinema, with its ambivalent relationships toward entertainment and the colony’s postwar cityscape. As we conceive it, the cityscape involves not just the visual appearance or physical aspects of a city but more broadly a set of social and cultural processes—ranging from political changes and transformations in the media and popular cultural ecosystem to the increased public role of women—that evolves in a period of rapid urban-industrial development (Tonkiss 2006; Shiel and Fitzmaurice 2011).

Colonial Hong Kong was a transregional hub of Cold War ideological confrontation. Washington and its Chinese ally, Chiang Kai-shek’s Taiwan, struggled with Beijing for the hearts and minds of overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia and around the world. The local colonial government tried to maintain control through claiming neutrality in relation to superpower politics and extended Communist-Nationalist conflicts while asserting its power whenever it deemed necessary against challenges from the opposing camps. Pro-Communist émigré cinema in the mid-twentieth century was a prime cultural manifestation of this Cold War ambivalence. After an initial period of radicalization and antagonism in the first two years after Mao’s victory on the mainland, the pro-Communist studios in Hong Kong had increasingly shifted to an accommodating, pragmatic approach that emphasized ideological restraint and entertainment values. They sought to maintain a strategic presence in the local film industry and, thereby, serve as a point of contact to the region’s Chinese diaspora. This strategy change, which entailed an ambivalent struggle between ideological commitments and entertainment imperatives, apparently first started following the colonial clampdown on Communist-led cultural activism around 1952–53. Later, with the emergence of the two pro-Free China giant studios, Motion

Pictures and General Investment Co., Ltd. (MP&GI) and Shaw Brothers (SB), the cinematic ecosystem in Hong Kong was significantly altered. In order to hold on to their market presence in a more and more competitive and capital-intensive film industry, pro-Communist film companies embraced a more entertainment-oriented ethos that adhered closely to popular genre trends (such as the romantic comedy set in an emerging urban middle-class milieu in the late 1950s), while struggling to remain truthful to their political commitment. With in-depth analysis of two popular films by Zhu Shilin, *The Dividing Wall* (*Yiban zhi ge* 1952) and *Sweet as Honey* (*Tiantian mimi* 1959), we seek to historicize the ways in which the Beijing-sponsored film establishment in 1950s Hong Kong negotiated and balanced a changing set of political, ideological, and commercial interests in pursuit of its strategic mission.

### Radicalization of Mandarin Cinema

Hong Kong occupied a special position in the Cold War where the global, the regional, and the local intersected, and where the Communists, the Nationalists, and the United States contested for hegemony. Neighboring China's southern province of Guangdong, the British colony had since the nineteenth century been the gateway to the mainland, and, with its efficient transportation network, enjoyed a strong link to the Chinese community in Southeast Asia. It attracted people of different backgrounds. Especially after WWII and Communist victory in 1949, with the colonial policy of political neutrality, hundreds of millions of Chinese moved to the colony, ranging from destitute refugees, senior intellectuals, famous filmmakers, and entrepreneurs. The enormous movements of ideas, talents, and resources, coupled with its established media environment, made Hong Kong a crossroads of Cold War cultural conflicts and cinematic warfare (Fu 2023, x-xi, 110, 149).

As a result of the civil war between the Communists and the Nationalists after WWII, many film producers, directors, scriptwriters, and stars relocated from Shanghai to Hong Kong and began making Mandarin films in a primarily Cantonese-speaking territory. While many of these émigré film workers were politically unaligned and only wanted to work in a place with a relatively stable political climate, there were also some (such as Cai Chusheng and Wang Weiyi) who were dedicated communists fleeing the Nationalist reign of terror. Despite being in exile, they sought to accomplish the agenda of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to set up a base in Hong

Kong cinema, which had grown gradually but steadily over the following few years and largely changed the “landscape” of the local film industry.

The increasing presence of pro-Communist cinema in Hong Kong did not go unnoticed and was met with hostility from various forces. The local colonial government, despite its efforts to maintain a semblance of neutrality so as not to antagonize the Communist leaders in Beijing, sought to restrain pro-Communist filmmaking through censorship, surveillance, and deportation (Du 2017; Yip 2017, 38–43). The exiled Nationalist government in Taiwan, on the other hand, sought to counter the leftist tide by mobilizing anti- and non-Communist filmmakers as well as offering financial and market incentives to politically unaligned film companies in exchange for their support (Fu 2023, 20–23). The United States, too, was involved in this anti-Communist crusade in Hong Kong cinema. For example, the Asia Foundation, a CIA front, secretly funded two studios, Asia Pictures and the little-known Kuo Phone Productions, as part of its effort to bolster pro-Free World Mandarin filmmaking in Hong Kong. It also played an active role in organizing the Asia Film Festival with the aim of promoting technological modernization and political unity of all Free Asia film industries. Similarly, the State Department’s United States Information Service (USIS), in the words of its veteran officer Richard McCarthy, worked in “supporting filmmakers who were producing anti-Communist pictures in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia” (O’Brien 1988; Leary 2012; Lee 2016).

But even with all the surveillance, blockade, and isolation, the Communists were in a strong strategic position to win the cinematic Cold War in the 1950s. With the Communist victory and takeover of China in 1949, which vowed to inaugurate a new era of national revival and autonomy, the émigré film community was swept by what an insider called a “patriotic fervor” (Shen 2002). Indeed, in the 1950s and early 1960s, members of the pro-Communist film community were known (especially among themselves) as “patriotic” filmmakers rather than “leftists,” which, with a derogatory connotation, became common only after the Cultural Revolution-inspired riots in 1967. This rising tide of nationalism was closely conjoined with personal considerations. As Mandarin cinema had limited financing and market outlets outside of the mainland, émigré filmmakers longed to return home. It was important for them to show allegiance to the new rulers. Starting in 1948, more film artists were involved in Communist-run “study groups” (*dushu hui*) to keep abreast of the mainland’s cultural and political developments. Shortly after the founding of the PRC, they formed a delegation to visit and entertain the troops in the recently liberated southern city of Guangzhou, meeting with senior party leaders and cultural officials and

helping mobilize public support for the new order (Su 2014, 28–32; Wang 2006, 111–17).

Émigré filmmakers returned home in droves shortly after the Communist takeover of China in 1949, while others were rejected for work in China or were advised to stay behind to help galvanize overseas Chinese's support for the revolution. To this end, one of the key goals of the Communists was to seize control of Yung Hwa, the largest film studio in postwar Hong Kong. At the time, there were fierce contests between Beijing and Taipei—with, to different extents, US and British intervention—for allegiance and control of Hong Kong's key Nationalist enterprises, such as the Bank of China and China Civil Aviation Corporation. Although never owned by the Nationalist government, Yung Hwa's owner was sympathetic to the Chiang regime. It became a prime Communist target not only because it was reputed to have the best modern production facilities in the city, but also due to its rapidly deteriorating financial situation/financial troubles since the Communists swept into power. Unable to pay salaries, it survived on loans from its Southeast Asian distributor, the Cathay Organization. Confusion and agitation ensued. Adhering to the CCP film study group's strategy of infiltrating and taking control of the production departments of major film studios in the 1930s (Pang 2002), pro-Communist film workers joined Yung Hwa and incorporated strong political messages into some of its films. Allegedly refusing to allow his studio to "fall to Communism," Li Zuyong, the owner of Yung Hwa, was rumored to burn one of those politically charged films, Li Pingqian's *A Rich Man in Distress* (*Gongzi luonan* 1950). The conflicts led to a strike organized by the local CCP film study group in late 1951 that stopped the company.

The colonial government quickly and harshly intervened in the strike, deporting ten accused ringleaders—including Communist leader Sima Wensen, scriptwriter Shen Shu, and actors Liu Qiong and Shu Shi, all key figures in the pro-Communist film community—in January 1952. One reason the colonial authority came down so quickly and hard on the strike was that, as Governor Alexander Grantham told his Singapore counterpart, the Communists had established a robust position in the film world thanks to the creation of a strong media apparatus during the Chinese Civil War in the late 1940s (Fu 2023, 8–9). Furthermore, it is important to note that the Yung Hwa strike took place at a time that saw a rising tide of labor activism in the city. In the early 1950s, pro-Beijing trade unions took the Communist triumph as a call for anti-imperialist, anticolonial struggles. A string of strikes and mass protests ensued, including those by militant tramway employees, seamen, and dockyard workers. The British government had feared that Beijing

would seize Hong Kong by inciting mass political violence (if not militarily) and was therefore adamant in clamping down all disturbances to prevent a possible Communist takeover (Carroll 2007, 138–48; Mark 2004). Indeed, shortly after the Yung Hwa strike, an even bigger clash broke out between the colonial authority and pro-Communist activists: following a huge fire in Tung Tau Village that claimed many lives in December 1951, several textile workers were arrested and deported for organizing protests against lack of government aid. Then, a massive clash occurred on 1 March 1952, when tens of thousands of pro-Communist activists were allegedly angered by rumors of the colonial police's refusal to allow the Guangdong provincial government delegation to bring relief to the fire victims. They clashed with the police along Nathan Road in Kowloon, leading to many injuries and more than a hundred arrests. The Communist organ, *Ta Kung Pao*, moreover, was suspended for spreading allegedly inflammatory materials. Only after Beijing interceded—protesting the colonial government's heavy-handed oppression of Chinese people and threatening to reconsider China's policy about Hong Kong—was the suspension reversed. This diplomatic crisis gave rise to a new wave of deportation by the colonial authority. The Yung Hwa strike and the Tung Tau Village events, as we shall see, marked the beginning of a shift to entertainment and political accommodation in the patriotic cinema.

### **“A Revolutionary Cinema of the Capitalist System”**

While Li Zuyong won praise from anti-Communist press as a Nationalist loyalist and, after much pleading, received a loan from Taiwan to resume production, the colonial government, in an alleged attempt to prevent politicization of the local film industry, retrieved the studio's crown land in the name of urban renewal. The struggling Yung Hwa shuttered in 1956. Its major creditor, the Singapore-based Cathay Organization, took over the production facilities to set up its production arm, Motion Picture and General Investment Co., Ltd. (MP&GI), in Hong Kong. Despite the deportation of key film workers, the pro-Communist film community was able to make headways in building an interlocking network of production and distribution facilities in the few years following the failed Yung Hwa strike. They included, most prominently, the Mandarin film studios Great Wall (Chang Cheng) Movie Enterprise and Phoenix (Feng Huang) Film Corporation, Sun Luan (Xinlian or United Film Corporation) and its sister group, Zhonglian (Union Film Enterprise), both of which focused on making

Cantonese-language films, and Southern (Nanfang) Film Corporation, a secretly PRC-owned distribution company (Xu 2017, 245–47; Su 2014, 3–22; Yip 2017, 36–38; Hui 2018). Camouflaging as private enterprises with overseas Chinese investment to neutralize their political background, the pro-Communist studios—known today as Chang-Feng-Xin in short—and Southern were, characteristically, what US historian Kenneth Osgood (2006, 1–15) calls the state-private network that aimed to take advantage of the open market and “window” to the capitalist world afforded by British Hong Kong to tell stories about the Chinese Revolution to Chinese diasporas.

Some untapped sources on Great Wall bring to light the formation and workings of the so-called Chang-Feng-Xin group. The prehistory of Great Wall was fraught with controversy; it suffices to start with the takeover of the studio in 1950 by Yuan Yan’an, a Shanghai attorney and relative of Fei Yimin, publisher of the Hong Kong Communist organ, *Ta Kung Pao*. As the studio was impoverished, he brought in Fei Yimin and Lu Jiankang, a so-called Red capitalist with strong Beijing connections and made a strategy shift to make films for the mainland market. To reduce the deficit, he recruited new talents among young émigrés. Carefully groomed, three of these newcomers—Xia Meng (Moon Hsia), Fu Qi, and Shi Hui—quickly rose to prominence and became the top stars in the pro-Communist film world. Their star appeal, together with superior craft and seriousness of purpose, helped make some Great Wall films—as well as those from other patriotic studios—top box-office grossers in the early 1950s.<sup>1</sup>

Other sources of funding also helped boost the patriotic cinema in Hong Kong. According to Sue Dawson, a *China Mail* correspondent, Great Wall received annual pre-production fees, which ranged from HK\$200,000 (A-class) to HK\$120,000 (C-class) per film, for four pictures that it was set to sell

1 Box-office statistics from 1950s Hong Kong are hard to come by, but the limited evidence we have does indicate the market success of patriotic films. In 1951, for instance, Li Pingqian’s *A Night-Time Wife* (*Jin hun ji*), a Great Wall production, was the highest grossing Mandarin-language film in Hong Kong, followed by three productions—Zhu Shilin’s *Should They Marry?* (*Wu jiaqi*) and *Flora* (*Hua guniang*), and Wang Weiyi’s *The Fiery Phoenix* (*Huo fenghuang*)—by Loon-Ma and Wushi niandai, the two companies that would merge to become Feng Huang (“Yi jiu wu ji nian” 1952). Similarly, three films by Great Wall—Yue Feng’s *Modern Red Chamber Dream* (*Xin honglou meng*), Tao Qin’s *Father Marries Again* (*Yi jia chun*), and Li Pingqian’s *Honeymoon* (*Miyue*)—held the top-grossing spots in 1952, while Zhu Shilin’s *The Dividing Wall* was at the sixth place (Wang 1953). In 1955, Hu Xiaofeng’s *Loves of the Youngsters* (*Da Ernü jing*) came in third place, while topping the box-office chart was Sang Hu and Huang Sha’s *The Romance of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai* (*Liang Shanbo yu Zhu Yingtai*, 1954), a Shanghai Yue opera film from China whose immense success in Hong Kong would pave the way for the trend of costume opera films pursued by both Shaw Brothers and patriotic studios (“Yi jiu wu wu nian” 1956).

to China (Dawson 1953). It is not clear, however, whether the subsidies also covered selling to the Southeast Asian countries, which (along with Hong Kong) were the main target markets for the pro-Communist studios. Indeed, boasting the ability of its films to “cover all overseas Chinese communities” (Dawson 1953) in publicity materials, Great Wall made clear its goal to reach audiences in every major Southeast Asian country—from Vietnam, Thailand, Burma, and the Philippines to Singapore, Indonesia, and Borneo—as well as those in India, Japan, and the Pacific.

Although the subsidies were small (the average cost of a black-and-white Mandarin film in the 1950s was around HK\$200,000), they did provide a stable source of revenue. Stability was of utmost importance to Mandarin filmmaking in the 1950s, a period characterized by a terrible business environment because of geopolitical turmoil, economic uncertainty, and volatile market conditions in the region after the onset of the Korean War. Beijing’s funding made the patriotic film companies depend less on box-office performance unlike other privately owned studios. They were thus relatively free from the need to chase market trends—at least in the early to mid-1950s—despite being subject to the dictates of Beijing’s Cold War propaganda effort and periodic political turmoil. At the same time, patriotic studios kept their overhead costs low. Their employees, on average, had the lowest pay in the industry, and they were paid, it was publicly claimed, in accordance with egalitarian principles. (However, judging from their fashionable outfits and comfortable homes, their top stars were more equal than the others). What inspired the patriotic filmmakers, besides the stable income, were a mix of idealism and a sense of community. Acclaimed directors Li Pingqian and Zhu Shilin, for example, fled to Hong Kong to escape the burden of accused collaboration with the enemies in Japanese-ruled Shanghai and were quickly recruited into the patriotic film world. Out of their alleged commitments to serve the new China, they had stayed there for the rest of their career, despite credible rumors of attractive offers they received from pro-Nationalist film companies such as Shaw Brothers. Equally important was the careful way in which the studio management orchestrated a collective sense of community, one that was lauded as both morally and politically superior to the decadent and egotistic lifestyles of many Hong Kong filmmakers. Instead of partying and hobnobbing with the rich and famous like those working in noncommunist studios, the patriotic film workers organized “wholesome, collective” activities such as picnics, hiking, swimming, basketball games, holiday gatherings, and various trips to China; for the top stars, there were even occasional visits with political elites in China (Law 2006, 105–16; Ho 2012, 150–88).

The patriotic studios, like other local Communist-backed media organizations, reported through the Hong Kong and Macao Work Committee to the State Council's Foreign Affairs Staff Office in Beijing headed by Premier Zhou Enlai and General Chen Yi. Overseeing the affairs in Hong Kong was Liao Chengzhi, Zhou's trusted aide in charge of the united front work for overseas Chinese (Xu 2017, 242–45). According to several sources, Liao tried to pursue, through all the ideological twists and turns in China up until the onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, a policy in line with the CCP's flexible and pragmatic approach to the patriotic cinema in Hong Kong. This approach emphasized using the British colony as an encountering point and telling the stories of new China to the twelve million overseas Chinese around the globe, especially in Southeast Asia, to neutralize the influence of the US and Taiwan, which commanded a well-placed apparatus of overseas Chinese organizations, including schools and business associations (Oyen 2012). As Liao explained to a group of patriotic studio officials in 1964, Hong Kong had a different role from the mainland in the revolutionary process of China; its primary function was to promote patriotic sentiment, build bridges to overseas Chinese communities, and avoid provoking political censorship in the region. For this reason, he declared that "Hong Kong cinema should be understood as a revolutionary cinema of the capitalist system" and "a branch of the socialist-proletariat cinema in the motherland" (Fu 2023, 13–15). It should, accordingly, emphasize ultra-radicalism and over-politicization. In other words, the mission of Hong Kong's patriotic cinema was neither to export revolution nor to incite anticolonial struggles, but rather to maintain a strategic presence in the cultural battlefield of Cold War Hong Kong in order to build a united front with friendly Chinese people around the globe (Liao 1990, 215–19, 275–79, 323–25, 395–99, 451–58).

Liao Chengzhi presented the above ideas in the mid-1960s, but this strategic goal of avoiding colonial suppression and strengthening the position of patriotic cinema in the Hong Kong film industry had its origin in a much earlier time. For instance, after the failed Yung Hwa coup and the Tung Tau Village incident that led to violent confrontations with the colonial government in late 1951 and early 1952, the Film Bureau of the PRC Ministry of Culture in 1954 criticized patriotic film workers in Hong Kong for overpoliticization and ultra-radicalism that provoked mounting colonial intervention and alienated film artists. They urged patriotic film organizations to keep a low profile, to tone down their rhetoric, to refrain from forcing ideology on others, and to avoid head-on clashes with the colonial government (see Su 2014, 26–58). This emphasis on political accommodation had by and large become the guiding strategy for the pro-Communist studios in Hong

Kong, and the dominant trend of Chang-Feng-Xin productions from the mid-1950s up through the beginning years of the Cultural Revolution can best be described, in the words of top patriotic cinema official Liao Yiyuan, as films that aimed to be both edifying and entertaining, with the ultimate goal of “guiding the audiences to do good” (*dao ren xiang shan*) (Ho 2012, 152; Yip 2017, 36–39). This shift of emphasis raised alarm among American cultural warfare officers, who called these more entertainment-oriented films from the left “pinkies” and warned of their potential ability to bolster the strategic position of patriotic cinema in the war for hearts and minds (“Survey” 1956).

### *The Dividing Wall*

With historical hindsight, *The Dividing Wall* (*Yiban zhi ge* 1952), a social drama directed by Zhu Shilin, marked an ambivalent transition from the early phase of radical anticolonialism and anticapitalism to an approach of accommodation: giving emphasis to “guide the audiences to do good.” A prominent theme of pro-Communist films emerging from the earlier revolutionary phase had been the call for returning to the homeland—to abandon the colonial evils of Hong Kong for the glory and dedication of building a new China. That was originally the message of *The Dividing Wall* as well, which was produced by the Long-Ma (“Dragon-Horse”) studio. Founded in 1950 by Fei Mu, the eminent director of *Spring in A Small Town* (1948), and Wu Xingcai, a Shanghai business tycoon and long-time film investor, the studio sought to take advantage of Hong Kong’s economic stability to make films of both artistic and social values. In comparison to some small pro-Communist studios, notably Da Guangming, Nanguo, and Wushi Niandai, which sprang up after 1946 and brought to the market films with strong ideological tendencies, Long-Ma had only limited connections with the CCP cultural leadership. It boasted a strong roster of Shanghai filmmakers including veteran director Zhu Shilin, actress Wei Wei, and the Wushi niandai staff, but had been struggling financially almost immediately after its inception. In 1953, it was reorganized and transitioned into Feng Huang (Wong 2001, 72).

Before making *The Dividing Wall*, Zhu Shilin had made two artistically acclaimed films for Long-Ma, namely *Flower Girl* (*Hua guniang* 1951), a powerful re-evaluation of the meanings of a pro-Japanese collaborator, and *The Show Must Go On* (*Jianghu ernü* 1952), which dramatizes the sufferings of a group of refugee acrobatic artists in the British colony before they

decide—happily—to return to China. No sooner had *The Divided Wall* begun shooting in 1951 than the project was in danger of being aborted, as several of its key crew members—including male lead Liu Qiong, and scriptwriters Qi Wenshao and Bai Chen—were deported for their involvements in the Yung Hwa strike. Despite its low budget and last-minute change of the main male character (to Cantonese actor Li Qing), *The Dividing Wall* was carefully crafted, adroitly weaving the tradition of social realism in 1930s Shanghai left-wing cinema into a sympathetic and moralistic portrayal of petty urbanites with fluid cinematography and well-designed mise-en-scène. In a setting that evokes pre-1949 Shanghai as much as postwar Hong Kong, the film tells the story of two low-level white-collar workers—a primary school teacher (Li Qing) and a junior office clerk (Han Fei)—struggling to survive in a crowded city beset with exploitation and social inequality. The two male urbanites live in tiny, rented rooms divided by a paper-thin wall. Their sufferings at work (e.g., constant abuses by their nasty, snobbish bosses who care about nothing but profits) and burdensome family responsibilities (while they live by themselves, they must support large families residing elsewhere) are only intensified by their claustrophobic living conditions. They hate each other. The many petty conflicts they have (e.g., loud music, bathroom time) are comically performed by actor Han Fei and exaggerated by fluid panning shots. These light-hearted moments make *The Dividing Wall* intimate and entertaining.

Concomitant with the many comedic moments that punctuate the film, *The Dividing Wall* presents class inequality and housing problems as part of a capitalist cityscape that is modern and Westernized. The film begins by showing the natural and social environment of Hong Kong Island, which is beautifully situated between the mountains and the sea and dotted with numerous modern buildings. The camera then cuts to the Central District, where tall European-style office buildings and big department stores dominate the cityscape and allude to the modern capitalist economy of the British colony. A couple of fast-speed pan shots show the bustling crowds, the shuttling trams and cars, and the enormous signs of major banks, including those of the Bank of Guangdong and the United Bank of China, all evoking a sense of tremendous speed and a hectic, money-is-everything lifestyle. These images capture the tense, fast-paced modern urban life reminiscent of the overwhelming (if not frightening), almost neo-sensationalist representations of Shanghai in the opening pages of leftist writer Mao Dun's famous novel *Midnight (Ziye)* from 1930 (Lee 1999, 3–5). The camera then tilts upward and zooms in through a window to the interior of an office, where the Han Fei character is seen overwhelmed with work and reprimanded by the manager

for a minor typing mistake. This opening sequence clearly establishes the distinct cityscape of colonial capitalism and points to the oppression and alienation of ordinary people laboring within this system.

It takes a new neighbor, Ms. Hua (played by new actor Jiang Hua), to help the two men understand their shared victimhood under the colonial capitalist system. Reminding one of the familiar revolutionary women in Shanghai left-wing dramas (e.g., Li Xinqun in *Liren xing* or *Two for the Road*) or the female party cadre found in Chinese socialist movies of the early 1950s, Ms. Hua, whose last name is synonymous with China, is tall and fit, with a polite but no-nonsense demeanor, and teaches at a pro-Communist primary school. Unlike the rowdiness of Li Qing character's students, none of whom pay attention to his teaching, she is shown in a long sequence interacting excitedly and proudly with her enthusiastic and well-behaved students about the enormous size, the huge population, and the enormous resources of new China. This patriotism goes along with dedication to community service: Ms. Hua's students voluntarily help their teacher move to her new home with joy and satisfaction.

It is this patriotic, dedicated female teacher, then, who saves her male neighbors from mutual recriminations. At about two-thirds into the film, the three characters have a picnic together in a park. While sharing food and drinks, Ms. Hua smilingly helps the office clerk and schoolteacher to realize their respective biases and self-centeredness. The attitudes of the two men begin to change; they tear down the dividing wall to share the living space together. Yet what the film calls for are the humanistic values of cooperation and empathy rather than collective action against oppression dramatized in earlier pro-Communist productions, even though its ending is in some ways more ideologically ambivalent. As the film draws to a close, Ms. Hua reveals that she is going back to China to reunite with her fiancé, which puts an unexpected halt to the office clerk's clumsy efforts to woo her (which has created many humorous scenes). Although subtly expressed as a romantic reunion, Ms. Hua's decision harks back to the radical trope of returning to the homeland. The closing shot of the two men holding hands with Ms. Hua to leave the apartment is especially ambivalent. While the audience knows the two transformed neighbors will stay on in Hong Kong, the image of their walking toward the camera conjures up a recurrent trope found in, among earlier radical films, *Da Guangming's Floating Family* (*Shuishang renjia* 1949, dir. Gu Eryi) and *Great Wall's Home, Sweet Home* (*Nanlai yan* 1950, dir. Yue Feng), where the characters resolve, collectively, to abandon the corrupted colony to join the building of a new socialist motherland.

## Struggling Between Political Commitments and Entertainment Imperatives

As we see from the above discussion, the strategic goal of building a tactical presence in the local film industry and maintaining a point of contact with the outside world, particularly overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia and around the globe, led the pro-Communist film studios in Hong Kong to embrace a strategy of moderation. Overt political and ideological mobilization was eschewed in favor of softer moral lessons and social messages that would avoid antagonizing the colonial government and more effectively appeal to the local and regional audience. Such an approach appeared to work in much of the 1950s: the films from the left did very well at the local box office, and the production pace for Great Wall and Feng Huang increased steadily over the years.

However, things started to change toward the end of the decade. For one thing, the Hong Kong Mandarin film industry had become more competitive and entertainment oriented, and propelling this shift was the move by two Singapore-based companies with massive theater chains in Southeast Asia to establish or boost up production operations in Hong Kong. As pointed out earlier, Cathay acquired the debt-ridden Yung Hwa in 1956 and reorganized it into MP&GI. The new company, under the remote leadership of Singapore-based tycoon Loke Wan Tho, quickly launched an ambitious attempt to modernize Mandarin-language cinema. To accomplish this goal, MP&GI modelled its production and management practices after the classical Hollywood studio system (vertical integration, contracted directors and stars, the practice of script supervision, etc.). It also focused on making films—primarily urban comedies, melodramas, and musicals—that celebrated American-style modernity and middle-class values, highlighted exuberant scenes of singing and dancing, and utilized a Hollywood-influenced visual style characterized by elegant cinematography, high-key lighting, and stylish production design. At about the same time, Run Run Shaw came over to Hong Kong to assume control of the stagnant Shaw and Sons (which had been under the control of his second brother, Shaw Runde, since the 1950s) and rename it to Shaw Brothers. Even more than MP&GI, which would be its main competitor in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, Shaw Brothers built itself as a modern industrial organization with a vast studio facility (i.e., the Movietown) and hundreds of employees under long-term contract. This enabled the company to adopt an assembly-line model of production for maximum efficiency and profit (Kong 2008). In contrast to MP&GI, the Shaws initially focused not on films with contemporary urban settings and

themes, but rather on opulent costume pictures, including a string of box office-smashing *huangmei diao* opera films, that evoked a keen sense of nostalgia and cultural nationalism (Fu 2023, 129–45).

With the establishment and rapid expansion of MP&GI and Shaw Brothers, the ecology of Hong Kong Mandarin cinema was fundamentally changed. As mentioned earlier, Hong Kong Mandarin cinema had found itself in a difficult business environment beset by limited capital flows and shrinking market outlets since the Communist takeover of China in 1949. Most film studios were small and poorly equipped. All of this, not surprisingly, led to inconsistent production schedules and qualities. Against this context of an industry-in-crisis, the significance of the intervention of MP&GI and Shaw Brothers is thrown into sharp relief; what these two studios brought to the local cinema was a rationalized, Hollywood-style system of management and mass production as well as a heightened entertainment-oriented ethos emphasizing star power, genre appeal, and modern film technologies. At the same time, the fact that both studios, due to lack of access to the mainland Chinese market, aligned themselves with Taiwan (the largest Mandarin-speaking community outside of China) put them into the other side of the ideological spectrum from the patriotic studios and exerted more pressure on the latter to maintain its market presence in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. With growing competition from two big, ambitious film companies siding with Free China and the local film industry becoming increasingly entertainment driven, the patriotic studios and filmmakers had no choice but to respond to these challenges and reposition themselves vis-à-vis changing market demands. Thus, we see, from the late 1950s onwards, a concerted effort on their part to make films in the best-selling genres of the time, most notably romantic comedy, costume opera dramas, and, after the mid-1960s, martial arts movies. As Vivian P. Y. Lee (2020, 41–42) recently argues, “The Cold War [in British Hong Kong] was as much a war of the market as it was a war of ideas ... To stay in the business, film studios regardless of political orientations had to abide by the law of the market.”

The importance of keeping abreast of and adapting to market trends was nothing new. It was raised by the studio management from the beginning and reiterated repeatedly in the subsequent years. Yuan Yang’an (1950), the general manager of the restructured Great Wall, first brought up this point in an essay appearing in the inaugural issue of *The Great Wall Pictorial*, the official publication of the studio: “I do not reject the concerns of producers about ‘market value’ (the so-called ‘business eye’). I think that a narcissistic attitude, one that only aims to create audiences and refuses to adjust to them, is too high-sounding. Making concessions to audiences under certain

conditions is not just bad, but necessary” (n.p.). Similarly, writer-director Su Chengshou, who would shortly afterward make a high-profile switch to pro-Taiwan studios, stressed the notion of cinema as an “entertainment enterprise” (*yule shiye*) and thus the need to draw more audiences in by accommodating their psychological needs (Tang 1956, 25).

It is clear, then, that the patriotic studios of Hong Kong, to claim a place in the commercial mainstream, had always given ample attention to matters related to market trends and audience preferences. However, it should be stressed here that what makes a film, or a particular kind of film, popular varies over time, and this explains in many ways the changing production trends of pro-Communist film companies over the years. For instance, in the recovery period of the early to mid-1950s, social realist films that offered sympathetic portrayals of ordinary people living in hardship and addressed issues of social injustice and redress found a receptive audience among the underprivileged and the working class who made up a sizable portion of the audience at the time. Also popular, especially with more highbrow viewers, were films (often with a strong didactic bent) that conjured up the spirit of the May Fourth Movement in opposing the oppressive feudal culture and promoting new cultural values (such as female liberation). Not surprisingly, these two types of film constituted a staple of patriotic cinema in the period: Zhu Shilin’s *Should They Marry?* (1951), *Festival Moon* (*Zhongqiu yue* 1953), and *Between Fire and Water* (*Shuihuo zhi jian* 1955) were classic examples of the first group, while the second group was best represented by Yue Feng’s *The Stormy Night* (*Kuangfeng zhi ye* 1952) and Li Pingqian’s *It So Happens to a Woman* (*Wo shi yige nüren* 1955).

However, with a rapidly modernizing Hong Kong and the local film industry and culture becoming more entertainment oriented from the late 1950s on, film companies needed to recalibrate what kinds of film to make so that they would remain competitive. The patriotic studios were no exception in this regard; they sought to diversify their films in terms of content and style, trying hard to engage with best-selling genres to stay close to the interests of local and regional audiences. A good case in point, as exemplified by films such as Hu Xiaofeng’s *Those Bewitching Eyes* (*Yan’er mei* 1958) and Zhu Shilin’s *The Way of a Husband and a Wife* (*Fuqi jing* 1958), was the growing emphasis given to urban romantic comedies—and to the screwball subgenre in particular—which paralleled the prevailing production focus of MP&GI at the time. The popularity of these films reflected in many ways a growing demand for lighthearted and upbeat entertainment (in contrast to the more melodramatic situation of poverty and hardship that pervaded earlier films), but it also stemmed from the new urban middle-class imaginaries they

proffered, which highlighted (petit-) bourgeois social life and relationships in a modern cityscape marked by high-rise office buildings and shop-lined streets, bustling traffic, and emerging forms of leisure (including television and air travel). This new emphasis dovetailed nicely with the changing milieus and ethos of Hong Kong propelled by the city's economic takeoff and the concomitant processes of urban growth and upward class mobility. Yet the projections of bourgeois or petite bourgeois sociality and sensibility not only had great appeal to the growing middle-class audience in Hong Kong (and the diasporic Chinese communities in the region); they also spoke to the young baby boom generation born after WWII, who tended to be more open and receptive to modern urban lifestyles. What they found in these romantic comedies of the late 1950s (and beyond) was not merely a dream far removed from reality. Rather, the films enabled them to negotiate new facets of Hong Kong (and diasporic Chinese) modernity and to imagine an identity of and for an evolving time and place.

But despite its need to embrace a more entertainment-oriented approach and capitalize on the latest market trends, the patriotic cinema sought to continue its declared mission of making spiritually and morally uplifting films. This entailed a delicate balancing act: the need of the studio management and creative team to negotiate and reconcile a set of competing aesthetic, ideological, and commercial objectives, producing works that would meet the twin objectives of moral/ideological education and diverting entertainment. It is understood that such a balance was not always easy to achieve, and the incongruence and tension became especially evident from the late 1950s and early 1960s onward. In this regard, *The Great Wall Pictorial* would sometimes publish reviews that were critical of the studio's own films. *Those Bewitching Eyes*, for instance, was disparaged for its depiction of the female protagonist, whose capricious (*renxing*) attitude was dismissed as mere imitation of foreign films and not something that should be shown in a progressive Chinese film. Besides, the humor in the film was also deemed too Westernized (Xu 1958). More seriously, the growing emphasis on entertainment values was also attacked by the film establishment in Beijing, which raised doubts about the heavy financial strains in supporting such ideologically dubious films. Between 1954 and 1961, Beijing imported eighty films from the patriotic studios from Hong Kong; only thirty-five of them were publicly shown in big cities, and a mere eight in smaller cities. This put Chen Huangmei, PRC Ministry of Culture Film Bureau Chief, on the defense. While acknowledging the limitations of the films' ideological values, he tried to justify funding patriotic filmmaking in terms of strategic necessity: "We cannot fulfil the kind of mission they [the pro-Communist

studios in Hong Kong] are fulfilling now,” Chen (1962) explained to the skeptical cadres. “If they stop production, overseas Chinese could only watch American imperialist movies ... It was tough for them to [make films] in a place under imperialist control” (Chen 1962).

### *Sweet as Honey*

In what follows, we will use *Sweet as Honey* (*Tiantian mimi*) as a case study to further shed light on the tension between educational aspirations and entertainment values that had increasingly confronted the pro-Communist studios of Hong Kong since the late 1950s. First released in early 1959, *Sweet as Honey* was a Feng Huang production co-directed by Ren Yizhi and Chen Jingbo, with Zhu Shilin listed as the “chief director” (*zong daoyan*). This practice of crediting Zhu as “chief director” in films that were mostly executed by codirecting newcomers started in the mid-1950s and continued into the early 1960s. The reasons for this were two-fold: on the one hand, it was used to nurture talents and give the novices opportunities to hone their skills under Zhu’s guidance (Wong 2001, xxii). On the other hand, Zhu was a well-respected veteran filmmaker who had proven himself a box-office draw in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia, and the inclusion of his name thus helped sell a film.

*Sweet as Honey* tells the story of a newlywed couple, Chang Mingyang and Ding Huilan, played by Fu Qi and Xia Meng, respectively. Despite being deeply in love with Huilan, Mingyang has a tendency of lying to her—that he does not smoke or has never had a lover before, for instance—in order to keep her happy. One day, Mingyang’s cousin and childhood sweetheart, Wang Baozhu, comes to Hong Kong from Singapore and asks for his help in looking for her missing husband. Afraid to have his lie exposed but also not willing to follow in the footsteps of his father-in-law, who is constantly nagged by a jealous wife about his past relationship with a woman, Mingyang lies again that Baozhu is the lover of a coworker. This, however, only makes matters worse and leads to more deceptions and deceptions. All this builds up to a farcical dinner scene in which Mingyang and his father-in-law try to feign innocence before their wives by engaging in a series of hilarious but futile tricks and fabrications. Eventually, Huilan finds out the truth and helps Baozhu reunite with her husband and exposes Mingyang’s lies, but not before another messy brawl full of buffoonery and horseplay.

In dealing with what can be called the “way of husband and wife” (*fuqi zhi dao*), especially the importance of being honest to one another in a

marriage, *Sweet as Honey* retains the goal of guiding people to do good that had become the defining trait of Hong Kong's patriotic cinema since the early to mid-1950s. And the fact that Baozhu, one of the major supporting characters in the film, comes from Singapore also points to the strategic importance of Southeast Asia for the pro-Communist film establishment, whose primary mission was to help establish a united front with overseas Chinese in the region. But we can also see some new tendencies in the film, notably the softening of the didactic tone and the prevalence of a lighthearted and playful spirit. As an urban romantic comedy centered on coincidences and plot twists, witty dialogues, and farcical situations revolving around conjugal conflicts and love battles between middle-class characters, *Sweet as Honey* exemplifies the screwball comedy, which flourished in Hollywood during the studio era of the 1930s and 1940s. The genre also gained in popularity in Hong Kong (Mandarin) cinema around the late 1950s, after MP&GI's *The Battle of Love* (*Qingchang ru zhanchang* 1957), a huge box office hit directed by Yue Feng and scripted by Zhang Ailing,<sup>2</sup> ignited a proliferation of romantic and screwball comedy films that sought to replicate and build on its success.

Like *The Battle of Love* and the American screwball comedy that inspired it, *Sweet as Honey* depicts a world of urban, middle-class life and well-to-do protagonists that contrasts sharply with the working-class milieu in many patriotic films from the first half of the 1950s. The protagonist couple, for instance, live in a spacious house furnished with Western-style modern furniture and flanked by a small garden, and their public activities are situated largely in places—Western-style restaurants, a chic contemporary hotel, a busy office building with a watch store and other shops, etc.—indicative of the burgeoning middle-class cityscape of Hong Kong. Not that middle- or even upper-class societies and characters had not been portrayed before—*Festival Moon* and Hu Xiaofeng and Su Chengshou's *Sunrise* (*Richu* 1956) are but a few examples—but they were usually treated as caricatures of capitalist vices that served as a criticism of bourgeois decadence and class inequity. Yet, in *Sweet as Honey*, the representations of middle-class affluence are very much taken for granted and function as a neutral backdrop against which the silly but harmless games of lies are played out. In the film's opening scene, for instance, we see Mingyang and Huilan returning to their house after their honeymoon—which was very much an upper- and middle-class (and Westernized) practice at the time. At one point, Huilan is

2 According to a report, *The Battle of Love* grossed more than HK\$150,000 and broke the ten-year box-office record for Hong Kong Mandarin films ("Qingchang ru zhanchang" 1957).

seated in front of a large vanity mirror in the bedroom. The camera slowly dollies in until the image is entirely filled by the mirror, and it is via this mirror perspective that the rest of the sequence is presented to the viewer: Mingyang can be seen approaching Huilan from the background and sitting beside her. They exchange some sweet lover's words, and it is at this moment that Mingyang lies to Huilan about her being his one and only love in life. The fact that this lie, which is what triggers the subsequent farcical events in the film, and all the sweet talks surrounding it are visually framed as a mirror image (i.e., something illusory and not real) brings out the ideas of false appearance and deception. Yet these ideas are not explored through the lens of class in any meaningful ways and thus fail to work as a satire on, say, the hypocrisy and pretense of the middle class. Rather, they are conceived primarily as universal moral issues pertaining to the couple's way, or else exploited as narrative ploys that add to the entertainment values of the film.

Ironically, while *The Battle of Love* goes far beyond *Sweet as Honey* in its depiction of bourgeois luxury—a spacious country villa with a tennis court and a swimming pool; classy convertibles and stylish outfits—it does so in a way that both celebrates and challenges the affluent class and their lavish lifestyles. A good case in point involves the plotline about a middle-class worker ridiculously trying to impersonate the rich and woo the wealthy hero, which suggests the illusory and out-of-reach nature—for most of the local and regional audiences at least—of upper-class extravagance highlighted by the film. *Sweet as Honey*, however, has little of this self-reflexivity that would allow it to cast a more critical eye on the class issue. Situated within a solidly middle-class milieu but lacking in any meaningful reflections on class differences and relationships, the film's exploration of conjugal ethics does little to interrogate or challenge the status quo of the middle class. In fact, as a (relatively) well-made, easygoing comedy with likeable characters and farcical but harmless complications arising from white lies and partial truths, the film can be said to affirm the petit-bourgeoisie's penchant for stability, moderation, and respectable middle-brow entertainment.

Furthermore, compared to *The Battle of Love* (and the Hollywood screwball comedy that inspired it), *Sweet as Honey* also shows marked differences in terms of its gender representations. It is frequently noted that screwball comedies have a propensity for portraying emancipated and strong-willed women on an equal footing with men. A characteristic feature of the genre, Stanley Cavell (1981, 16) maintains, resides in “the creation of a new woman, or the new creation of a woman,” which is bound up with a new phase in the history of female consciousness in the United States and represents a focal point in the changing modern cityscape and

urban imaginary. Adhering closely to this female-centric perspective, *The Battle of Love* puts at the center of its narrative and visual attention a spirited and mischievous heroine, played by superstar Lin Dai, who spends the majority of the screen time flirting with her suitors (and even causing a brawl between them as she looks on laughing) in order to make her beloved cousin jealous. Even though the latter rejects her affection to the very end, the last shot of the film—with Lin Dai's playgirl character laughing and embracing her cousin's neck from the back as he is nervously driving his car—suggests that it is she who has the upper hand in this battle of love. In her sly manipulation of men, the female protagonist in *The Battle of Love* embodies what Kenny Ng (2008, 169) calls “a feminist vision,” exhibiting “a provocative charisma and transgressive impulses ... to contest a male-centered worldview.”

In sharp contrast to this assertive heroine and her freewheeling spirit, Hui-lan in *Sweet as Honey* is a much more passive and conventional character—a cute beauty who is credulous (she is unsuspecting of the many lies told to her by Mingyang), inexperienced (she has no clue how to get the truth out of Mingyang and has to rely on her mother's ruse), and likes to be pampered (Mingyang has to hug her to sleep after he lies to her about seeing a rat in the bedroom). Her passivity and lack of agency are also reinforced by the film's narrative, which is driven not by what she does, but by the white lies of her husband. A comparison between *Sweet as Honey* and another urban romantic comedy scripted by Zhang Ailing, Sang Hu's *Long Live the Wife* (*Taitai wansui* 1947), makes this point clear. Telling lies with good intentions is also a key narrative impetus in this older film from postwar Shanghai. Specifically, the film focuses on Chen Sizhen, an ordinary Shanghai housewife played by Jiang Tianliu, who is required to maintain the order and well-being of the family by repeatedly lying to others and maneuvering through her husband's infidelity and its unpleasant repercussions (bankruptcy, extortion, etc.). Her manipulative power, it should be noted, does not necessarily entail female liberation or resistance, for under the veneer of a woman possessing the agency of artful deception and ploy there is also a subtle sense of loss and compromise in the sacrifice of a devoted housewife who fails to break out of the oppressiveness and victimization of conventional domesticity (Fu 2000, 102). But in putting the narrative focus squarely on the female protagonist, the film does highlight her private interest and desire as well as her struggle against patriarchy and the family system.

What we see in *Sweet as Honey*, however, is a reversal of this female-centric (and quasi-feminist) perspective. The narrative is now centered on Mingyang, the film's male protagonist, whose deceits and lies are what,

unwittingly, drive the story and set into motion a string of farcical situations. And unlike the maneuvers of Sizhen in *Long Live the Wife*, his acts of deception are no symptomatic manifestation of patriarchal familial ideology and its oppressive burden on women, but rather a man's petty effort to avoid the unpleasant nagging of a jealous wife. In all this, Huilan is stripped of her agency and relegated to a secondary role in the film. True, she does find out the identity of Baozhu and makes a fool of Mingyang (and everybody else) by keeping this information secret in the last fifteen minutes or so of the film, but this moment of power is too little, too late and does not fundamentally change her characterization as an innocent but also bland and shallow wife. As such, Huilan deviates from the typically strong-willed and assertive heroines in screwball films. In fact, she is also markedly different from the main female lead, also played Xia Meng, in *Those Bewitching Eyes*, an earlier screwball comedy from Great Wall. In that film, the heroine is blocked from her relationship with a hardworking man by her snobbish parents and forced to marry a rich but vulgar guy. Frustrated, she produces different madcap schemes—faking suicide, running away from home, and even pretending a prospective marriage with her godfather—to sabotage her parents' plan. In her mischievous and rebellious spirit as well as her quest for independence, she is more akin to the Lin Dai character in *The Battle of Love* than to Huilan in *Sweet as Honey*, but as noted earlier, it is also these qualities that led to the heroine being criticized as “capricious,” too “Westernized,” and not apposite to a “progressive” film. Symptomatic of the underlying tension in Hong Kong's patriotic cinema at the time, the turn to the screwball comedy was motivated largely by commercial considerations, but this “imported” genre required, to reiterate Cavell's words, “the creation of a new woman”—one who epitomizes an incarnation of American/Western modernity in the rapidly changing cityscape and urban imagination of Hong Kong—deemed incompatible with official Communist ideology. Thus the “taming” of the female protagonist in *Sweet as Honey*, whose portrayal, ironically, was in many ways a regression not only from the heroine in *Those Bewitching Eyes* but also from those female characters who struggle with oppressive traditions and aspire to independence and freedom in many previous patriotic films. This regression happened to contrast with the increasing appearance of strong, modern women characters such as “factory girls,” “teddy girls,” and “Jane Bonds” (a mix of female knights-errant and feminized James Bond spoofs), as well as the new breed of fashionable actresses in Hong Kong cinema of the 1960s and 1970s, which attracted many young female audiences (Chang 2019, 150–73; Yeung 2023).

## Epilogue

In this essay, we explored how Beijing-backed patriotic film companies strove to build a strategic market presence in Hong Kong, and, through it, to extend its influence on the overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia and the globe. To avoid provoking suppression by the colonial government, they gradually moved away from an explicitly politicized agenda to adopt a more ideologically moderate and flexible approach. We argue that the ambivalent transition became increasingly evident as early as 1952 and 1953, after the failed Yung Hwa strike and the violent March First clash. As demonstrated in *The Dividing Wall*, a direct victim of mounting colonial suppression, this approach of moderation and accommodation prioritized making films with progressive humanistic content, which meant taking a stand against oppressive traditions or exposing and satirizing social inequalities, all under the banner of guiding people to do good. It also sought to inject more entertainment elements (such as comedy) into the films. With the rise and rapid expansion of MP&GI and Shaw Brothers, which pushed Hong Kong Mandarin cinema toward the direction of big-budget and market-driven productions in the second half of the 1950s and beyond, patriotic studios were forced to respond by focusing even more on generic conventions and other box-office attractions—even if this entailed, as in the case of *Sweet as Honey*, further thinning out the ideological commitment and edifying aspirations of their films.

Like other urban romantic comedies in Hong Kong cinema of the period, *Sweet as Honey* opened a space that articulated and negotiated the fast-changing cityscape of the colony shaped by class, gender, and emerging urban imaginaries. Yet these romantic comedies were not the only films that appealed to audiences at the time; also popular were successive trends of period movies nostalgically transporting viewers to an imaginary Chinese past. For instance, after a string of costume opera films from China—including *The Romance of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai*, a lavishly made, romantically themed Shaoxing opera film, as well as Shi Hui's *huangmei diao* opera film *Married to a Heavenly Immortal* (*Tianxian pei* 1955) and Tao Xu's Cantonese opera film *Searching a School* (*Sou shuyuan* 1956)—became box office sensations in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia, local film companies were eager to cash in on this trend. It was Shaw Brothers, with its box office shattering *huangmei diao* opera films such as Li Han-hsiang's *Diau Charn* (1958) and *The Kingdom and the Beauty* (*Jiangshan meiren* 1959), that beat to the punch, but Great Wall was not far behind, putting into production a number of Shaoxing opera films, including Hu Xiaofeng's *Bride Hunter*

(*Wang laohu qiang qin* 1961) and Li Pingqian's *The Princess Falls in Love* (*San kan yumei Liu Jinding* 1962), at about the same time. Similarly, the patriotic studios tried to ride on the success of Shaw Brothers' "new school" (*xinpai*) martial arts films in the second half of the 1960s and turned out their own swordplay movies. As Great Wall actor and director Hu Xiaofeng lamented: "Making films in Hong Kong is not determined by the artist but by the box-office. Trends and audience tastes are constantly changing. We are forced to follow the best-selling trends" ("Hu Xiaofeng" 2001: 169).

Our reconstruction of the "Patriotic" studios' shift of production strategy raises an important question: was there an increasing disappearance of Cold War ideological duality in Hong Kong cinema with the rise of big studios and the ensuing transformation of the cinema ecosystem? It is beyond the scope of this essay to address this question in a comprehensive way, and further research is needed to fully delineate how the Beijing-backed patriotic studios sought to maintain their market presence and to fulfill what Sam Ho (2012) calls their "artistic mission" of telling China's story to overseas Chinese communities amid changing political, social, and film-industrial circumstances. What is clear, however, is that the history of pro-Communist filmmaking in Hong Kong is not as monolithic as is usually thought. Rather, it is a fascinating story, full of surprises and revelations, waiting to be discovered.

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## 8. A Model Market Town on the Cold War Frontier: Luen Wo Market in the New Territories, 1947–79<sup>1</sup>

*Anthony H. F. Li*

**Abstract:** The New Territories of British Hong Kong were at the forefront of the Cold War in the 1950s. A case study of the modern town development of Luen Wo Market from 1947 to 1979—which involves the British colonials in Hong Kong, Indigenous Inhabitants in the New Territories, immigrants from Mainland China, and foreign Christians from abroad—provides a nuanced understanding of the spatial complexity of the Cold War frontier with high liminality and porosity in British Hong Kong. With a detailed discussion of the architectures and activities on the ground, I argue that the townscape of the Cold War frontier in Luen Wo Market was characterized by a sense of impermanence, and the cultural hybridity under collaborative colonialism and covert anticommunism.

**Keywords:** Cold War, frontier, townscape, liminality, porosity, Hong Kong

### Introduction

The Cold War is usually characterized as a period of ideological contestations between communism and capitalism without direct military conflicts between the Soviet Union and the United States. Yet, historical episodes of the Cold War were intermingled with multilevel conditions whose

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complexities are beyond a binary understanding. As Song (2018, 11) argues, multilevel complexity with the geopolitical frontier in East Asia is better discerned by studying how activities of various actors on the ground are intersected and interlaced. The Cold War left its imprint on Hong Kong not just by turning it into a Cold War frontier with the geopolitical calculations of the United Kingdom and the US (Mark 2004; 2017); it also affected various aspects of the daily lives of residents in the colony (C. K. Li 2021; Fu 2013; Roberts and Carroll 2016). In the New Territories of Hong Kong, new town development was instrumental to the projection of Britain's fragile presence during the early years of the Cold War filled with political instability and uncertainty. But this was complicated by the fact that the New Territories was not officially ceded from China but on a lease due to expire in 1997, with a significant presence of Indigenous Inhabitants (原居民) who settled there prior to the British arrival in 1898 and immigrants from Mainland China after 1949. The landscape of a town established during the Cold War was thus jointly shaped by the British colonials as well as those who resided in the town. This signifies the zeitgeist of the Cold War in a distinctive way as the case of Luen Wo Market demonstrates with its urban design and modernist architecture, and the culturally diverse activities which took place in it.

### **The Making of a Cold War Frontier in the New Territories**

After the end of WWII, East Asian countries were preoccupied with nationalist movements to break away from the control of the Europeans and the Japanese. In a similar vein, China managed to relinquish all foreign concessions after 1946, except for Hong Kong which remained in British possession following the three bilateral treaties signed between the UK and imperial China in 1842–1898 (Li 1996). With the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 and the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, the US established a defense commitment to Taiwan held by the Nationalists (or the Kuomintang, KMT) (Lin 2016) and formed a closer alliance with the UK. The role of British Hong Kong was thus contemplated in the grand strategy of the US against communism. Short of the US guarantee of Hong Kong's security, British Hong Kong was mostly utilized by the Americans as a hub for intelligence gathering about the PRC (Mark 2004, 207). It was also a site of propaganda campaigns to target the Chinese intellectuals who fled Communist China (Mark 2007, 1168), and a naval port where US military vessels could be called on in

times of Sino-British tensions (Steele 2016). While the UK welcomed the American involvement in East Asia as it wanted to retain Hong Kong to recover its trade interests in East Asia (Carroll 2007, 126), it also took measures to avoid antagonizing the PRC with its colonial presence in Hong Kong.

The PRC, despite its repeated and unequivocal territorial claims over Hong Kong, saw the colony as one of the few leverages to earn much-needed foreign currency and to divide the Anglo-American alliance (Mark 2017). While the issue of sovereignty over Hong Kong was put aside for the moment, the CCP nevertheless maintained covert operations in the British colony (Loh 2018). These constitute what is later known as the PRC policy of “long-term planning and full utilization” toward British Hong Kong. Meanwhile, the KMT from Taiwan also brought its political struggles with the CCP to Hong Kong which later culminated in social disturbances in the 1950s (Lam 2004). In assessing the situation, the governor of Hong Kong Sir Alexander Graham in 1955 noted that Hong Kong was unlikely to be taken by the PRC by force, but internal security threats from sabotage or subversions were anticipated (Steele 2016, 104). Under the shadow of these political powers’ contestations in East Asia, British Hong Kong was turned into a Cold War frontier.

A frontier can be conceptually understood as an “open and expansive space” (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013, 16). Duara (2016) argues that a Cold War frontier is manifest in British Hong Kong in two aspects. First, it was a geographical contact point between two ideological camps which aimed to expand into the other’s territory. Second, as the frontier is peripheral from the political metropole, it was distinctively characterized by its liminality, where the presence of actors is usually temporary before they leave for their final destinations, and its porosity, where actors are highly heterogeneous with no or minimal control by the formal political authority over their entry and exit. In the first aspect, the Cold War confrontation was manifest in the formal border controls between British Hong Kong and the PRC since 1950 (Zheng 2018), which was unprecedented as the flows of people and goods across the legal border between British Hong Kong and Imperial/Republican China were not hampered by any physical blockade before WWII for economic and social reasons.

The Cold War frontier in the second aspect merits a longer discussion with the manifestation of the Cold War in the everyday lives of residents. Despite the border controls, British colonials and local Chinese merchants in Hong Kong were also concerned about economic benefits from the bilateral trade with the PRC. In fact, cross-border economic activities for mutual benefit never ceased to exist. To secure the colony’s economic prosperity,

the Hong Kong government defied outright the British Commonwealth protocols regarding currency exchange when it came to trade with the PRC (Goodstadt 2009, 59). The British colonials also had a lenient policy toward illegal immigrants who managed to come to Hong Kong from Communist China with a view to attracting an employable labor force for industrialization (Zheng 2018). Economic concerns were also echoed by the local government on the other side of the ideological camp. As Bao'an County (Shenzhen) is distant from the political center in Beijing, it made good use of its geographical proximity to Hong Kong, or what local CCP officials referred to as a multinational market, for trade benefits despite the ideological baggage (Zhou 2021, 339). Smuggling across borders was also commonplace and particularly serious during the Great Famine in Guangdong Province in the early 1960s (Deng and Lu 1997, 297–98).

In the 1950s and 1960s, British colonials found their presence in the colony very insecure, and they had a low level of commitment to the long-term planning of Hong Kong under the shadow of a communist takeover (Cheung 2009). Some level of militarization along the border with the British military barracks and the police force headquarters was undertaken, but the British colonials knew that Hong Kong was indefensible in case of a Communist attack without American help (Mark 2017). Political pragmatism triumphed over equality in treatment between the New Territories and metropolitan Hong Kong (Kowloon and Hong Kong Island). The prewar New Territories was regarded as a “buffer zone” between China and the colony for British colonials (Carroll 2007, 67). Such mentality persisted during the Cold War as demonstrated by the immigration policy of the time. The so-called Touch-Base Policy during 1974–1980 stipulated that illegal immigrants could only acquire legal status for local residency when they managed to register in government offices located in the metropolitan area of the colony. For illegal immigrants, being caught in the New Territories would mean extradition back to Communist China (Zheng 2018). As such, the high liminality of the New Territories in Cold War Hong Kong was shaped by the mutual economic interests of the local governments on both sides of the border and the differential policy treatment toward the New Territories by the Hong Kong government. This sharply contrasted the low liminality of the Cold War frontier in the outlying islands on China's coast which underwent overt militarization in anticipation of the prolonged military conflict between the KMT and the CCP (Szonyi 2008).

Moreover, the political reality that the British colonial government could barely reach the postwar New Territories constitutes the porosity of the Cold

War frontier in British Hong Kong with the presence of Indigenous Inhabitants comprising the Puntis (本地人) and the Hakka (客家人) and the influx of immigrants from mainland China. The prewar New Territories were basically centered around agricultural activities and largely left to the political elites of the Indigenous Inhabitants to govern themselves (Lau 1999). Despite its attempt to exert greater control over the New Territories for autarky since the onset of the Cold War (Chiu and Hung 1999; Choi 2016, 43–44; N. K. Lee 2014), the British colonial government was limited in its capacity by the lack of knowledgeable personnel to administer the New Territories (Hayes 2012), and hindered by the reluctance of London to provide substantial financial assistance for further development of the colony (Goodstadt 2010; Ure 2012). Hence, British colonials needed the help of multiple social actors to govern the postwar New Territories as a Cold War frontier.

### **The Transformation of Landscape on a Cold War Frontier: Luen Wo Market**

In 1947, Pang Lok Sam (彭樂三), a former pastor of the Hakka Protestant church, the Tsung Kyam Church (崇謙堂), together with the Indigenous elites from the Pang (Puntis) and the Li (Hakkas) clans as well as other merchants with real estate investment backgrounds proposed to construct a market town northeast of the New Territories in Fanling (粉嶺). The initiative was soon echoed by the British colonials. Fanling was a place characterized by a cultural combination of Chinese and British influences. On one hand, it was filled with traditional Chinese walled villages as well as Taoist temples established prior to the British arrival in the late-nineteenth century (Chan 2006; Yau 2006). On the other hand, it was constructed with a British golf course and a real property estate of Western-style villa On Lok Tsuen (安樂村) in the early-twentieth century. Economically, it was one of the prominent vegetable production sites in the postwar New Territories. Politically, Fanling was geographically close to the legal border with mainland China and a few British military barracks. The site of the new market town was later endorsed by the New Territories Development Sub-committee of the Colonial Development and Welfare Committee (Hong Kong, HKRS260-2-29). Its location was adjacent to a prewar local market town called Shek Wu Hui (石湖墟) managed by the Liu clan (the Puntis) in Sheung Shui (上水) (fig. 8.1). Its close proximity to an existing market town indicates the British colonials' political support for the Pangs of Fanling over the Lius of Sheung Shui (Chan 2006).

A for-profit shareholding company called Luen Wo Land Investment Company Limited (聯和置業有限公司, hereafter LWLI Company) was established in 1948 to develop the market town. The first chairman of LWLI Company, Li Chung Chong (李仲莊), was an Indigenous gentry from Fanling and the first chairman of Heuk Yee Kuk (鄉議局, literally rural consultation council in Chinese), which was the political institution to govern the New Territories endorsed by the prewar colonial government (Sit and Kwong 2011). The first managing director, Pang Fu Wah (彭富華), was a leading figure of the Pang clan in Fanling. Reflecting the social marketing system in imperial China characterized by the interdependence of local lineages clustering in proximity for economic exchanges and social activities (Faure 1986; Skinner 1964), the financing of the market town was supported by the clans who were friendly to those who established it. From the records of initial shares purchased, supporters were mostly from the northern part of the New Territories, with a few from Yuen Long and Tai Po and the noticeable exception of the Lius in Sheung Shui. Some villages on record were even on the other side of the legal border when shares were first sold, although it was unclear whether they visited Luen Wo Market after its opening in 1951. The new market town was named Luen Wo (聯和, literally unity and peace in Chinese), which is identical to the name of a prewar Hakka self-defense group nearby (Constable 1994) and suggests the significant role of Pang Lok Sam in the initial establishment of the market town.

After WWII, the colonial government intended to develop the New Territories on par with the same sanitary standards of the metropolitan area in Kowloon and on Hong Kong Island (Hong Kong Government 1948, 73). The district commissioner of the time, John Barrow, had high hopes on the new market town and constantly referred to it as a “model town” which development was expected to bring great satisfaction to the colonial government (Hong Kong, HKRS934-7-82). Luen Wo Market was the first postwar town development in colonial Hong Kong (Bristow 1989). Its establishment is to some extent unique when compared to its successor satellite towns meant to cleanse refugee-occupied squatter huts in the metropolitan areas for industrial development (Smart 2005). It is also distinguishable from its prewar predecessors in other parts of the New Territories due to a more pronounced mark of the colonial government on its urban design and its development and management through a contractual agreement with a property developer controlled by the Indigenous Inhabitants.

The layout plan of the market town was prepared by the architect Mok York Chan (莫若燦) who was trained at the University of Hong Kong and outlined the urban design of the market town which was composed of

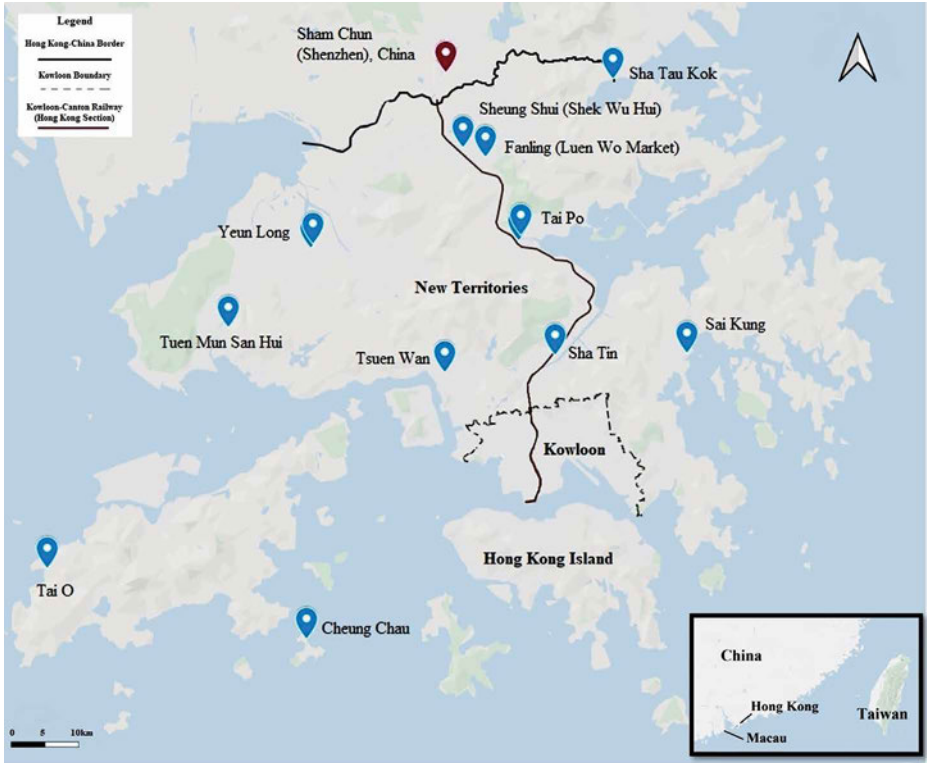


Figure 8.1. Location of Luen Wo Market and other marketing centers in the New Territories in the early 1960s (author's illustration based on Google My Maps).

two-story shophouses surrounding a public space designated for the sale of fresh foodstuffs. The public space was to be filled with a one-story concrete marketplace building and an open-air area for hawker's stalls. Space was also set aside for green belts and land reserves (fig. 8.2). This urban design resembled the "grand model" observed in other colonial towns established in the British Empire before WWII (Home 2013, 10). The marketplace building was equipped with modern sanitary facilities. Its modernist exterior and the functionalist interior for ventilation were unprecedented in the architecture of wet markets in other parts of the New Territories (fig. 8.3).

Stipulated in the agreement with the colonial government, LWLI Company was supposed to develop and manage the market town. The directors of LWLI Company were required to sign contracts with the colonial government to have housing projects developed in phases (see fig. 8.2) together with public roads connecting the market town to the main transportation system of the New Territories. Although its opening was affected by the outbreak of

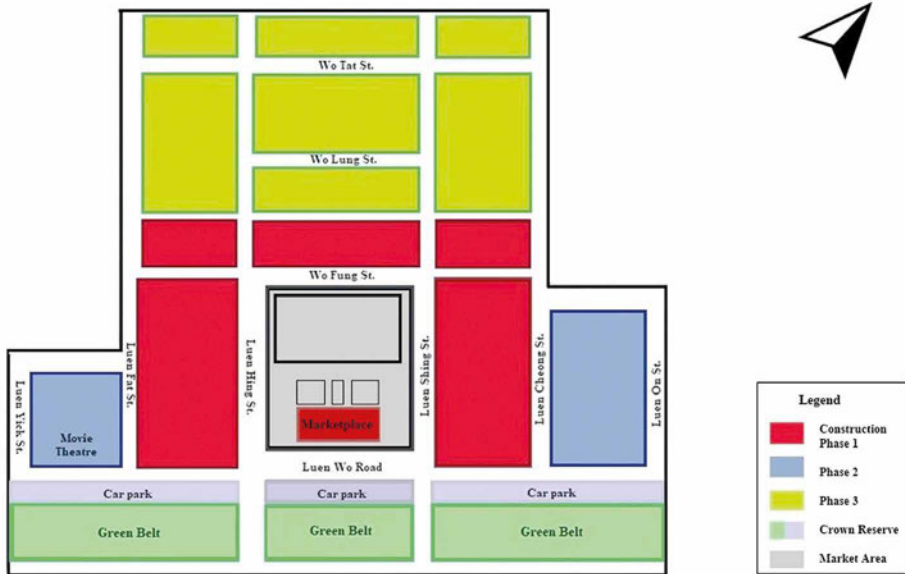


Figure 8.2. Original layout plan of Luen Wo Market (author's illustration based on Hong Kong Government Records Office, HKRS896-1-57).



Figure 8.3. The facade of the closed Luen Wo Marketplace building in 2011 (photographed by the author).

the Korean War, the market town was officially opened in January 1951 with a series of celebrative events, including staged Cantonese operas and football matches between teams from other parts of the New Territories (*Kung Sheung Daily News* 22 February 1951; *Wah Kiu Yat Po* 23 October 1951).

After its establishment in 1951, and given its geographical proximity to the legal border, Luen Wo Market soon attracted various groups of immigrants who fled the mainland. In 1961, Luen Wo Market was mentioned separately as one town center in an official census with a population of about 8,000 (Hong Kong Government 1962, 39). In the 1970s, the renowned Chinese scholar Lo Hsiang Lin (羅香林), who lived near the town, estimated that there were 116 villages which patronized the market town with about 37,000 people by the early 1970s (Lo 1970).

Residents of Luen Wo Market socialized principally with those who spoke the same language or shared a similar culture, but their need to patronize the market town gave them an opportunity to spatially intersect with each other before they returned home or departed for other destinations. After its opening, Luen Wo Market became a marketing center to serve residents of diverse sociocultural backgrounds such as the Hong Kong policemen recruited in Hong Kong and from Pakistan, the British military servicemen from Nepal (the Gurkha), the Hakkas, the Puntis, the Chinese immigrants, and residents from metropolitan Hong Kong for the fulfilment of their daily needs for basic necessities as well as entertainment. In the early 1950s, the market town was filled with an exceptionally high concentration of dancing clubs and drinking bars which catered to the British military servicemen who were temporarily stationed in the barracks nearby. In the late 1950s, other shops in the market town such as convenience stores, restaurants, photography shops, and auxiliary services for agriculture were also available for all who lived in districts near Fanling such as Kwanti (軍地), Ta Kwu Ling (打鼓嶺), and Sha Tau Kok (沙頭角), as well as the policeman at the nearby headquarters and the on-holiday military servicemen from the barracks. The hawker stalls in the open-air market area sold a variety of food, daily necessities, repair services, and second-hand goods for the Puntis and the Hakkas with a more economically challenged background (personal interview, 29 January 2013). Moreover, as Luen Wo Market was surrounded by agricultural activities in Fanling,<sup>2</sup> the market town also hosted the informal dawn market (天光墟) where local farmers came to sell fresh agricultural

2 For this reason, new schools of agriculture were established near the market town and annual agricultural exhibitions were held near the Fanling railway station since 1955 to facilitate the learning of new agricultural methods.

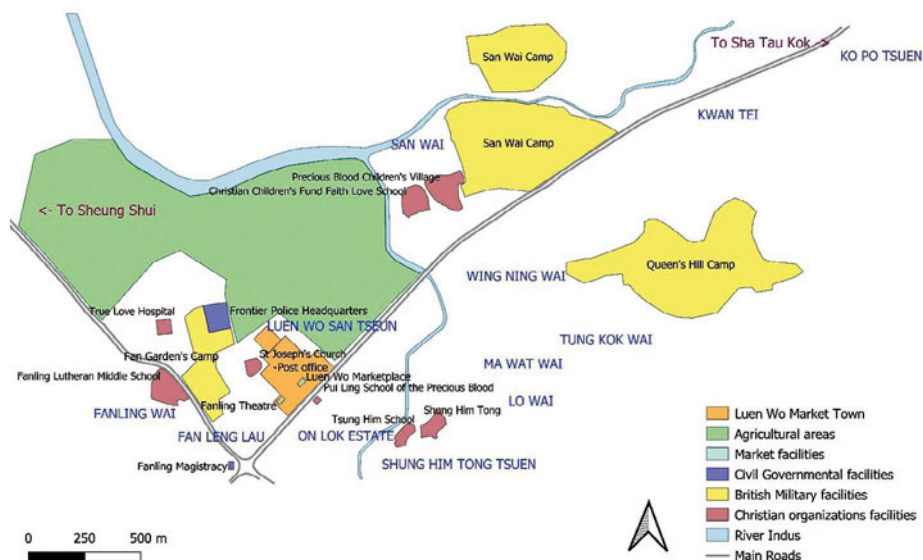


Figure 8.4. Luen Wo Market and its vicinity in the early 1960s (author's illustration based on Hong Kong Public Records Office, HKRS156-2-3633 and aerial photos of Luen Wo Market on 26 October 1961 from Lands Department, Hong Kong SAR Government).

produce before dawn and attracted some buyers who came all the way from metropolitan Hong Kong despite the poor transportation system.

Since the 1960s, colonial officials made attempts to extend their direct reach into the New Territories in general and the market town in particular. For instance, the building of Fanling Magistracy was completed near the market town in 1961 as the first British judiciary in the New Territories. Within the market town, the colonial government took initiatives to construct public facilities such as a public latrine, bathrooms, and playgrounds (Hong Kong, HKRS156-2-3633). Postal service was also extended to the market town in 1967 with a one-staffer office (fig. 8.4).

The developmental trajectory of Luen Wo Market changed course with the geopolitics since the 1970s. After the 1967 riot and the Sino-American rapprochement in the 1970s, London anticipated a future discussion with Beijing over the future of Hong Kong and modified its policy toward Hong Kong with a view to instilling a sense of civic pride in residents through a greater level of social development (Yep and Lui 2010). The Hong Kong government was also more financially capable of tackling development on its own after decades of economic growth. With the government-led satellite town development in the northern part of the New Territories, Luen Wo Market was kept only as one of the tourist attractions and gradually integrated into

the larger-scale urban development plans with metropolitan characteristics in the 1980s. After this brief sketch of the historical development of Luen Wo Market, how the development of Luen Wo Market epitomizes the Cold War frontier in British Hong Kong from 1947-1979 will be elucidated.

### **Liminality and Porosity of the Cold War Frontier in Luen Wo Market**

As previously mentioned, despite the ideological confrontation between British Hong Kong and Chinese Bao'an County, cross-border economic activities were never completely stifled on the Cold War frontier. Meanwhile, long-term commitment to the economic development of the New Territories was virtually absent and subject to the political uncertainty of the time. On the ground, it was manifest in Luen Wo Market by the presence of many makeshift building structures and the minimal social services for basic survival provided by foreign and local social organizations. Those foreign social organizations temporarily relocated to Hong Kong were active in providing humanitarian relief for refugees in the 1950s but gradually left for places with greater need in the 1970s (E. W. Y. Lee, et al. 2016). Those local social organizations provided basic social services for residents who considered staying in the New Territories only for a short time. While many new immigrants from China and other parts of Hong Kong came to the market town for a better life, many others also left for the same reason. With only a few economic opportunities in the New Territories as a result of the state-engineered spatial planning, new residents of Luen Wo Market made use of the transnational networks of their diasporic communities or social organizations in the market town in search of better lives elsewhere. In parallel, many Indigenous Inhabitants also left for the UK, continental Europe, or the US with the help of early migrants from the New Territories. Hence, long-term planning on the Cold War frontier was not just absent among the British colonials, but it was also out of the picture among those who lived in Luen Wo Market until the 1970s, signifying the liminality of the Cold War frontier and producing a sense of impermanence.

In addition, given the porosity of the Cold War frontier, the daily activities of the residents of Luen Wo Market encompass a great deal of cultural diversity. The social blending for those actors who temporarily stayed in the market town under the tacit approval of the British colonials constitutes the cultural hybridity of the market town underscored by collaborative colonialism. As Law (2009) argues, collaborative colonialism under the Cold War entails a distinctive type of colonial power resulting from the dynamic negotiations between British colonials and other social actors

who were against communism. For the governance of Cold War Hong Kong, British colonials exercised such power by carefully considering whom to partner with to secure their rule (Ngo 1999). The Chinese intellectuals who fled Communist China were soon chosen in the educational field of the colony (Chou 2012; Hamilton 2021; Mark 2004; Vickers, et al. 2003). The Christian organizations, which originated in Western countries and were by nature against atheistic communism, were also ideal partners in the field of education and social services, arguably more relevant to the New Territories where communist activities were deemed rampant after WWII (Leung and Chan 2003, 23–30; Smith 2005, 193; Sweeting 1993). Indigenous elites in the New Territories, who were mostly landlords and enjoyed extensive communal networks, were co-opted by the British colonials through the protection of their property rights as opposed to what happened in Communist China. In the case of Luen Wo Market, collaborative colonialism with covert anticommunism was manifest in its urban design and town management, the festive events of its residents, and the social services provided by a diversity of social organizations, underscored by the dynamic combination of British colonialism, Chinese cultural traditionalism, market capitalism, and Christianity.

To justify their colonial presence, the colonizers needed to construct a narrative asserting their cultural superiority over the local population (Bhabha 1994). Home (2013, 50–52) points out that the narrative of hygienic modernism was common for the British colonizers to impose upon the Indigenous populations in British colonies in Asia since the early nineteenth century, when the British epistemological conviction that urban space can be rationally designed and scientifically managed for human progress and public interest was at its height. Since the establishment of Luen Wo Market in the late 1940s, similar attempts were demonstrated with the British colonials' plan to shape how a model town should be designed and managed according to the British modern standard.

Nevertheless, the Indigenous elites (e.g., Li Chung Chong and Pang Fu Wah) managed the market town in a way distinctively different from British hygienic modernism since they did not speak English or share the same way of doing business. Many residents who patronized the market town might not be completely satisfied with the town management by the Indigenous elites, but they were not accustomed to British hygienic modernism imposed by the colonial government either. Over years of development, British colonials made pragmatic compromises in light of the local situations, while the Indigenous elites also accommodated parts of British modernism with their local customs transformed. Hence, the actual set of rules to govern Luen

Wo Market on the ground, and by extension the modernity it represents, was characterized by the hybrid reconfiguration of British colonialism and Chinese cultural traditionalism.

One prominent issue of dispute between the colonial government and the Indigenous elites was the acceptance level of hygiene for the marketplace. Within the area of the marketplace, some built-in sanitary facilities were reportedly removed and did not survive the passage of time. Individual stall owners also remembered the abandonment of the use of well water in the marketplace due to pollution from the daily activities of market users (personal interview, 22 June 2015). Another issue of dispute was about the social order around the market town, especially regarding the lack of modern discipline of unlicensed hawkers and illegal squatter huts. The colonial officials repeatedly filed complaints to the LWLI Company about these two issues (Hong Kong, HKRS934-7-83). Their dissatisfaction with these practices of the company, among other things, led to the revoking of its right to develop Luen Wo Market as a whole in 1961. Yet, the LWLI Company was reassigned the right to manage the marketplace under new legal terms. This compromised arrangement respected the customary practices of the Indigenous elites to manage the marketplace and to provide public weighting scale services for market users, which the Chairman Li Chung Chong regarded as the company's social obligation (Luen Wo Lands Investment Company 1950–1960).<sup>3</sup>

In addition, the Chinese name of a market town is called *hui* (墟, market). The root of this Chinese character (虛 emptiness) signifies the remnants of the Chinese social marketing system in which a market was only open for business periodically on a marketing schedule, as market patrons used to live very far away from the marketplace. Since housing in Luen Wo Market was right next to the marketplace, as time went by and the population grew in the northern region of the New Territories, the marketplace was gradually open for business every day with the marketing schedule gone. This shows how the British design of the model market town, where residents were agglomerated around a marketing center, had a cultural impact on the traditional operation of a marketplace.

Besides the distinctive modernization of the design, management, and operation of the market town, the festive events and social services organized by a range of immigrant associations, local social organizations, and Christian organizations also contributed to the cultural hybridity in Luen Wo Market. Some hometown associations were established to foster mutual

3 This arrangement lasted for decades until the official closure of the marketplace in 2003.

help and solidarity among members of the same place of origin in the market town. For example, the Hong Kong Punyu Fraternity Association chose to set up its office in the market town. Initially, it provided shelters near Fanling and basic subsistence items for members who struggled to survive. As a way of social networking, it also joined with other associations to celebrate the birthday of the goddess Tin Hau (天后誕) every third month of the Chinese lunar calendar.

Moreover, some members of hometown associations who were former KMT military servicemen fighting the CCP in the Chinese Civil War settled near the market town and did not go to KMT-controlled Taiwan for a variety of reasons; but they maintained some level of connections with those who did. They partnered with other local associations, such as the vegetables cooperatives in the vicinity, to host the celebration of the National Day of the Republic of China (ROC) every year on 10 October of the Gregorian calendar, which was also known colloquially as the Double Ten Festival (雙十節). On this special day, giant decorative plaques were placed at the facade of the Luen Wo Market building with the ceremony to hoist the ROC's national flag in the morning and a banquet for all invited guests and associations at night.

To provide social services for shopkeepers and subsistence farmers who wanted to make a living near the market town, organizations were established by the Indigenous elites and new Chinese immigrants. For instances, the Luen Wo Chamber of Commerce, which was established in 1958 and chaired by the son of Li Chung Chong, took care of the commercial interests of shop owners. With the concentration of agricultural activities near the town, Li Chung Chong together with Ling Dao Yang (凌道揚), who was a renowned American-educated expert in agriculture and forestry, also established the New Territories Agricultural Association of Hong Kong to look after the economic livelihood of members who were mostly located in the areas near Fanling (New Territories Agricultural Association of Hong Kong, 1959).

Since the early 1950s, old and new Christian organizations (both Catholic and Protestant) in Hong Kong were also called upon to provide schooling and medical services in the district. As Sewell (2019, 97–106) suggests, the historical coupling between imperialism and Christianity in mainland China made missionary work inconvenient at a time when Chinese nationalist sentiment ran high, but their arms-length distance from the colonial authority gave them some leverage to be accepted by the local residents as helpers who brought about an alternative to the kind of help associated with exploitative imperialism. The same can be said for the Christian organizations which

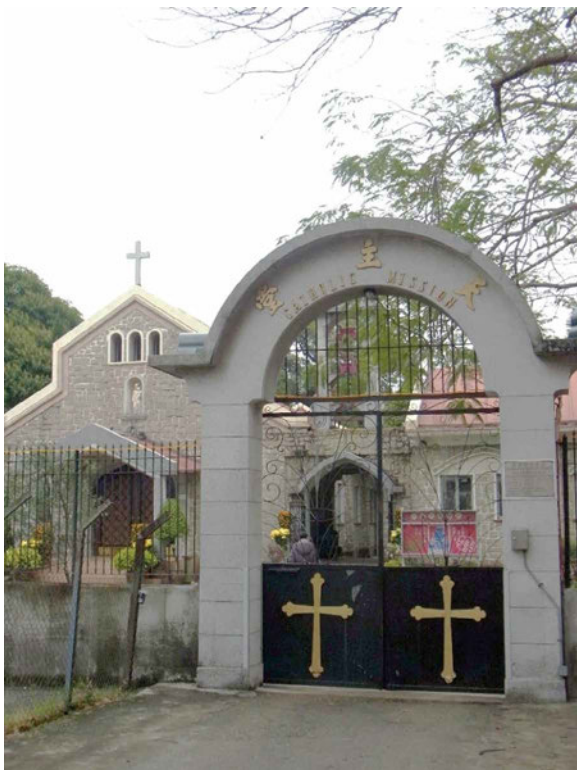


Figure 8.5. St. Joseph Church of Fanling in 2011 (photographed by the author).



Figure 8.6. Pui Ling School of Precious Blood in 2022 (photographed by the author).

brought Western modern schools, medicines, and social welfare institutes to the residents of Luen Wo Market. A resident did not have to be a convert to enjoy these social services, but some of them became church attendants.

For the Catholic Church, its service was expanded with the establishment of a new chapel known as St. Joseph Church by Rev. Ambrose Poletti in the market town (fig. 8.5) to cater to the needs of incoming clergy and new immigrants from mainland China. Catholic societies were mobilized to provide food, milk, medication, and education. Irish nurses such as Sister Fintan Ryan from the St. Columban Society were invited to operate clinics near the town (Yuen 2012). The Sisters of the Precious Blood also rallied to offer primary education for the kids in Fanling with the establishment of Pui Ling School of The Precious Blood in 1957 opposite to the Luen Wo Marketplace. Its three-story modernist architecture was once the tallest building in the market town (fig. 8.6).

Meanwhile, Protestant organizations in Fanling also contributed to social service provision. The long-established Tsung Kyam Church, where Ling Dao Yang and Lo Hsiang Lin were the church elders, asked for the assistance from its parent Protestant organization, the Basel Mission (巴色會), to send German medical practitioners to Fanling and provided necessary medical service for the residents. Some newer Protestant organizations, which came after they were ousted from Communist China in 1949, also temporarily settled in Luen Wo Market. With the attention of the international community to the refugee problems in the colony (Mark 2007), they started humanitarian relief services in the area with funding from countries such as the US. For example, the Christian Children's Fund came to Fanling for the operation of an orphan center and a school named Faith Love Christian Home and Faith Love School, respectively. In 1961, during the port call of the US aircraft carrier *York Town* in Hong Kong, a visit by a US military serviceman to the orphan center was arranged by the head of the Christian Children Fund in Hong Kong (*Wah Kiu Yat Po* 22 November 1961).

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong, established in 1954 and supported by its parent organization, the Lutheran World Service in the US, also began its service in Fanling and Sheung Shui with a chapter established in the market town under the arrangement of Rev. Luthard Eid (personal interview, 10 July 2015). In 1959, the True Love Hospital, which was the first modern hospital in Fanling and the second in the New Territories, was opened by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong with the support of the colonial government, the Hong Kong Jockey Club, and the Lutheran Church in the US (*Wah Kiu Yat Po* 18 February 1973). In 1964, Fanling Lutheran Middle School was also established as the first secondary school



Figure 8.7. Fanling Lutheran Middle School in 2022 (photographed by the author).

in Fanling with the financial sponsorship from abroad and was housed in a modernist building (fig. 8.7).

It is important to note that, while the British colonials did not have the capacity to substantially control the activities in the market town according to their own will, the documentary evidence from the governmental archives suggests that they did closely monitor the organized events with police intelligence reports to prevent things from going out of hand and asserted the right to issue the approval for local development projects and educational and medical services by the social organizations (Hong Kong, HKRS934-7-83). In this sense, the cultural hybridity of the market town as presented above was a product of the anticommunist coalition engineered by the collaboration between British colonials and the selected groups of Indigenous Inhabitants, ROC sympathizers, businesspersons, and Christians. Besides, the British colonials also propagated covert anticommunism through popular cultures to win the hearts and minds of the local population at large in the Cold War. When the only movie theatre in the market town was opened in 1953, the first movie shown free of charge was the documentary of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in that same year (Cheng 2011). As movie screening of the time was under state censorship on communist propaganda (Z. S.

M. Lee 2017), the movie theatre served not just to provide entertainment underlining the colonial and Western values to the residents of the market town, but also to dilute the influence of communism among them. In part, it helped engineer the political culture of depoliticization most Hong Kong people subscribed to in the 1960s and 1970s (Lam 2004).

The prevalence of collaborative colonialism with covert anticommunism in the market town could be testified further by the lived experiences of the residents who remembered patronizing the marketplace as a child with a general sense of calmness, peace, and safety when playing in the area despite being at the geographical forefront of the Cold War frontier (personal interview, 29 January 2013; personal interview, 29 January 2015). Even at the critical moment of the 1967 riot, when indiscriminate bombing was instigated by the communists in metropolitan Hong Kong and there was blood shed near the market town during an armed conflict in Sha Tau Kok between the British army and the militia from the PRC (Cheung 2009), the market town was surprisingly unaffected as far as residents could recall (personal interview 3, 2015; personal interview, 29 January 2015; personal interview, 7 June 2015). Such mental image of the Cold War frontier as manifest in Luen Wo Market is in sharp contrast to the official rhetoric by the British colonials which portrayed Cold War Hong Kong as the Berlin of the East on the doorstep of communist China and associated it with the tense ideological confrontation reminiscent of high walls, wires, and mounted guns near the Berlin Wall.<sup>4</sup>

## Conclusion

After WWII ended, British colonials intended to harness the initiatives of local Indigenous elites in the New Territories near the legal border with China to build a model town according to British modern standards. Located on the Cold War frontier characterized by high liminality and porosity, the development of Luen Wo Market fulfilled its market exchange function to meet the economic needs of sojourners and residents. But its material and immaterial infrastructures were far from what was originally envisioned by the British colonials with their policy ambivalence toward the New Territories and the

4 While restricted zones along the legal border were established on the side of Hong Kong, the zones were intended to control the flow of people and goods, rather than create a no man's land as was the case between East and West Berlin. Permits were obtainable for residents who lived in the restricted zones.

significant involvement of the Indigenous Inhabitants (both the Puntis and the Hakkas), Chinese immigrants, foreign Christians, and ordinary residents in governing the liminality and porosity. In this chapter, I argued that the architecture of Luen Wo Market and the activities of its residents from 1947 to 1979 signify the townscape of the Cold War frontier in two aspects: 1) A sense of impermanence manifest in the prevalence of makeshift building structures and temporary arrangements for the basic needs of the transient residents in the New Territories, and 2) the cultural hybridity under collaborative colonialism and covert anticommunism as shown in the modernist design and traditional Chinese management of the market town, as well as the festive events and social service provisions organized by both the local and Western social groups under the tacit agreement of British colonials. The paradoxical periphery of Cold War politics in the daily lives of residents on the Cold War frontier also qualifies the extent to which the official rhetoric that Cold War Hong Kong was metaphorically equivalent to the Berlin of the East.

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## 9. The Future Takes Wing: Kai Tak Airport and the Repositioning of Hong Kong, 1958-78

*Tze-ki Hon*<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** In this essay, I examine the history of Cold War Hong Kong through the lens of Kai Tak Airport. In Hong Kong, the Cold War started with the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, and the bipolar confrontation ended in 1979 when the PRC embraced a market economy and vigorously developed trade and commerce in areas surrounding Hong Kong. To elucidate the complexity of this short Cold War in Hong Kong, I will examine three images of Kai Tak Airport: its runway of the 1950s, its terminal of the 1960s, and its jumbo jet culture of the 1970s. My premise is that the airport is not merely a major public work of a modern metropolis. It is also a pillar of aeromobility that connects a city to the global flow of goods and visitors. This aeromobility gained a concrete geopolitical meaning during the 1960s and 1970s when the Western bloc—particularly Western European countries and the United States—were woven together culturally and economically through a jet air aesthetic driven by advanced aviation technology, global travel, modernist architectural style, mass media, and consumerism.

**Keywords:** aeromobility, Cathay Pacific Airways, Cold War, jet air aesthetic, Kai Tak Airport

### Introduction

Space is multifaceted and multidimensional. At the most mundane level, space exists physically like land, place, and territory. It appears on a map, in

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a zip code, or a home address. But space can also be a symbol, a signifier, and a brand name. It arouses feelings, provokes imagination, inspires aspiration, and, above all, shapes our behavior to conform to a certain structure. In some cases, space brings people together such as in a convention center, a sports venue, or a department store. In other cases, it separates people such as with a fence, a border, or a frontline. Because of its complexity and multiplicity, Henri Lefebvre (1901–91) identifies three aspects of space—the perceived, the conceived, and the lived.<sup>2</sup> While the perceived space is what we see in our eyes, the conceived space is produced in our minds through a system of signs that channels our emotions and expectations. The lived space (where we perform our daily chores) is a fusion of the perceived and conceived space. In carrying out our daily routines in the lived space, we are shaping and shaped by the production of space in response to changes in our society. Just as space is dynamic and fluid, so too are we dynamic and fluid as players in the production of space.

In this essay, I focus on the old Hong Kong Kai Tak Airport as a conceived space. Although it ceased to operate in 1998, the site of Kai Tak Airport today is a hodgepodge of realty development projects, including a cruise ship terminal, shopping malls, and high-end apartment complexes. But the shape of the airport remains visible, particularly its long runway pointing at the open sea beyond the narrow gap of Lei Yue Mun. In the 1960s and 1970s, this unique position of the runway made Kai Tak Airport globally famous. The runway was thrilling because flights arriving in Hong Kong had to make a sharp turn above the congested residential district before descending to the Pearl of the Orient. Likewise, the runway was inspirational because flights leaving Hong Kong had to ascend toward the open sea, as if boundless possibility lay ahead and unlimited opportunity awaited. In its heyday, Kai Tak Airport provided tremendous excitement and expectation when flying the friendly skies. No one would be bored when hearing “come fly with me,” as Frank Sinatra sang in a 1958 hit song.<sup>3</sup>

Archival sources indicate that this unique position of the runway was more a result of pragmatism than a stroke of genius. It was neither artistic nor aspirational by intent. Rather, it was the only option available amid the rising

2 In Henri Lefebvre's writings, these three aspects of space are also rendered as physical space, representations of space, and representational space. For Henri Lefebvre's conception of space, see Lefebvre (1991, 229–91). For discussions of Lefebvre's conception of space, see Stanek (2011, 81–132), and Butler (2012, 11–36).

3 Released in 1958, “Come Fly with Me” was a hit song by Frank Sinatra that glorified the glamor and splendor of the emerging aviation culture. For the significance of the song in the popular imagination of air travel, see Schwartz (2020, 6–8).

tension after the outbreak of the Korean War. Yet, through the production of space—especially in movies, paintings, popular songs, posters, and travel guides—this long runway became an emblem of a resilient city finding its footing in a tumultuous world. Meanwhile, the facilities inside Kai Tak Airport—its arrival hall, departure gates, check-in counters, restaurants, shops, global clocks, and multilingual signs—successfully projected an image of Hong Kong as a cosmopolitan city. Like major airports in the West such as Orly in Paris, JFK in New York City, and LAX in Los Angeles, Kai Tak Airport embodied the jet age aesthetic which highlighted speed, motion, and mobility at a time when leisure travelers flew around the world to see, taste, and consume.<sup>4</sup>

To this day, the history of Kai Tak Airport during the high noon of the Cold War has received scant attention.<sup>5</sup> This lack of interest is partly due to the complexity of the Cold War which took place immediately after the end of WWII and did not end until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. To many Hong Kong residents, the Cold War—especially the Cold War bipolarity—was full of painful memories, such as the relocation from mainland China, the restarting of a new life in the British colony, the United Nations embargo that decimated the Hong Kong economy, and the 1967 riots that caused strikes, deaths, and social unrest across the city. Whereas the Cold War was a bad dream to many Hong Kong residents, it was an inconvenient interlude to scholars of Hong Kong history. For some historians, Cold War Hong Kong did not fit the triumphant narrative of the Crown Colony evolving from a barren rock to a gorgeous city.<sup>6</sup> The British, the assumed heroes, were brought low during WWII. Worse, after the war the British were unable to hold on to their extended empire when their navy no longer ruled the waves. While Hong Kong did rebound in the 1960s and 1970s—first as a light-industry powerhouse and then as a global financial

4 For Vanessa Schwartz, the jet age aesthetic was a product of the advancement in aviation technology, airport design, media culture, and consumerism. For this reason, it highlighted speed, circulation, mobility, and, above all, fluid motion. See Schwartz (2020, 8–11).

5 Thus far, writings about Kai Tak Airport are confined to the history of aviation and airport design. See, for instance, Pigott (publication year unknown), and Bangmou (2015).

6 For a long time, the study of post-WWII Hong Kong was regarded as an extension of the British rule of Hong Kong beginning in 1840. As such, post-WWII Hong Kong was considered as either a progress toward a responsive governance or an implementation of the rule of law. In this narrative, the fear and anxiety of the Cold War were suppressed. By far, the most comprehensive coverage of Cold War Hong Kong is found in Roberts and Carrol (2016). Although the title of the volume does not mention the Cold War, many essays discuss aspects of Cold War Hong Kong including its economy, tourist industry, and higher education.

center—the story of Cold War Hong Kong was not as uplifting as the rags to riches narrative.<sup>7</sup>

### Three Images of Kai Tak Airport

In this essay, I will present a more complex story of Cold War Hong Kong through the lens of Kai Tak Airport. My premise is that the airport is not merely a major public work of a modern metropolis. It is also a pillar of aeromobility that connects a city to the global flow of goods and visitors.<sup>8</sup> When cities are connected by long-range, wide-body jet planes, a network of aerotropolises or airport cities emerges, shaping the direction, flow, and outcome of global commerce and transportation.<sup>9</sup> This aeromobility gained a concrete geopolitical meaning during the 1960s and 1970s when the Western bloc—particularly Western European countries and the United States—were woven together culturally and economically through a jet air aesthetic driven by advanced aviation technology, global travel, modernist architectural style, mass media, and consumerism. Initially limited to the wealthy elites but soon opened to mass consumers, air travel demonstrated the advantages of a market economy: freedom of choice, fluid mobility, and unbounded creativity. Together, airports and air travel helped to define the characteristics of the Western bloc, separating those who had freedom and mobility from those who did not.

Thus, from the perspective of aeromobility, the story of Kai Tak Airport is simultaneously the story of repositioning Hong Kong during the Cold War era. By joining the transnational network of airport cities within the Western bloc, Hong Kong moved away from an entrepôt for China trade and became a hub of transcontinental aviation system, extending from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, and from the Pacific Ocean to the Indian Ocean Basin and the Oceanic Region. This repositioning of Hong Kong was astounding if we consider the speed with which it took place. In less than two decades—from 1958, when the Kai Tak runway was officially opened, to 1970, when the first Boeing 747 jumbo jet landed in the refurbished Kai Tak Airport—Hong Kong was fully integrated into the

7 Recently, scholars of Hong Kong cinema have produced insightful studies of how the Cold War tension impacted movie producers and movie viewers. See Chang (2019) and Lee (2020).

8 For the concept of aeromobility, see Urry (2009, 25–38).

9 For a discussion of how airport cities connect the world, see Kesselring (2009, 39–59), and Budd (2012, 151–61).

economy of the Western bloc which included Australia, Canada, France, Germany, India, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. While the volume of Hong Kong's trade with mainland China remained substantial throughout the 1960s and 1970s, exports from the city were mainly aimed at consumers in Europe and the United States. As stated in a 1958 *Traveller's Guide*, the correct address of Hong Kong should simply be "Hong Kong," a stand-alone entity in the world trade.<sup>10</sup> By joining the transnational network of aviation through its Kai Tak Airport, Hong Kong was no longer British Hong Kong or Hong Kong as an entrepôt for China trade. It was Hong Kong as a hub in the market economy of the Western bloc.

Undoubtedly, this drastic change in Hong Kong's role in the global system was driven by bigger forces beyond the building and maintenance of an airport. Yet, through the mole's perspective of an airport, we see vividly the complex process through which this repositioning of Hong Kong took place. More important, this mole's perspective helps us understand the complexity of the Cold War in East Asia. In the West (meaning Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States), the Cold War was seen as a confrontation between two hegemonic universalist ideologies: democracy versus communism, freedom versus authoritarianism, market economy versus planned economy. It was also built around the fear of nuclear war and the arms race. But in Hong Kong, the Berlin of the East, the Cold War was more fluid and ambiguous because the epicenters were far away. It was tripolar in terms of foreign affairs (i.e., the American-British-Chinese relations) and quadrupolar in terms of the points of contestation (i.e., Beijing vs. Taipei, London vs. Washington D.C., London vs. Hong Kong, colonial rulers vs. Hong Kong locals).<sup>11</sup> In one stroke, Cold War Hong Kong was a revitalization of British colonial rule after WWII, a continuation of the Chinese civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists, and a battle to win hearts and minds for the ideological confrontation around the globe.

Just as the Cold War took different forms in different continents, so too the chronology of the Cold War varied from place to place. In Hong Kong, the Cold War started with the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, when the

10 *The Traveller's Guide*, June 1958, published by The Hong Kong Tourist Association. Aimed at tourists in Europe and the United States, the editor of the *Traveller's Guide* stated: "Hong Kong is remarkably clean, peaceful and healthy—especially by Eastern standards; it is geographically situated in the south of China mainland but is a British Crown Colony. The correct postal address therefore is simply 'HONG KONG.'"

11 In his account of the global cold war, Westad (2017) highlights the fluidity and multidimensionality of the Cold War. See also Romero (2014, 685–703).

entry of the PRC into the war brought the global confrontation to its front door. The bipolar confrontation ended in 1979 when the PRC embraced a market economy and vigorously developed trade and commerce in areas surrounding Hong Kong. To elucidate the complexity of this short Cold War in Hong Kong, I will examine three images of Kai Tak Airport: its runway of the 1950s, its terminal of the 1960s, and its jumbo jet culture of the 1970s.

To support my argument, I will combine archival documents with art works to analyze how Hong Kong was defined and depicted during these tumultuous times. My finding is that as the images of Kai Tak Airport changed from being concrete to abstract, factual to inspirational, Hong Kong's role in the Western bloc changed correspondingly from being a peripheral player to being a major force in the global economy. While these momentous changes in Hong Kong's economy (such as its development into a manufacturing powerhouse and a regional financial center) are well documented in current scholarship,<sup>12</sup> I add a new perspective by showing how these changes were facilitated by deliberate attempts to present Kai Tak Airport as a potent symbol of growth and development in the market economy.<sup>13</sup>

### Building a Runway for the Future

After the end of WWII, the British faced formidable challenges in reestablishing their rule in Hong Kong. First, the British had to reaffirm their legitimacy after three years of Japanese occupation. In this regard, the pressing problem for the British was to distinguish their rule from the Japanese, even though both were imperialistic in nature. This distinction became increasingly urgent when, in the early 1950s, the British continued to confront fierce demands for decolonialization around the world (Mark 2000, 837–61). Second, the British had to find ways to defend Hong Kong when their navy could no longer reach the Far East. In Mark's terms, defending far-flung colonies like Hong Kong was an existential quest for the British Empire as it struggled to keep its overseas interests intact (Mark 2004, 40–82; 2009, 45–71). To further complicate the matter, the British had to find measures to make Hong Kong look defensible when Beijing stationed large numbers

12 See, for example, Schenk (2001).

13 As shown in Peck et al. (2020), the socioeconomic changes in Hong Kong are often facilitated by modelling—matching reality on the ground with images in the heads. For a similar argument about how an image of an airport supports an ideology, see Vernon (2021, 213–47).

of soldiers on its borders, threatening to take over at any moment. Third, the British had to revitalize Hong Kong's economy from the ruins of the war. They had to reestablish the colony's position in global trade, including trade with mainland China. For the British, it made no sense to keep Hong Kong if she could not self-finance (Schenk 2001, 3–8).

In the 1941–1946 *Annual Report* of the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce, we find a concise expression of these British challenges. The report says:

Many important issues remain to be settled and the Colony may be faced with claims for very considerable amounts, indeed in respect of past events. We have no surplus balances and no Reserve Fund. There is, moreover, always the danger of a serious slump. But Hong Kong has shown remarkable powers of recuperation, and, if it can only enjoy several years of prosperity, there is no reason why it should not again gradually re-establish its finances on a sound basis. (16)

Although the future looked ominous, the leaders of the business community in Hong Kong found a ray of hope in Kai Tak Airport—a sleepy military airfield badly damaged during WWII. The report of the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce continues:

Enormous advances having been made in aviation during the war, the disadvantages of Kai Tak for the operation of modern aircraft have received much attention, sharpened by a shocking tragedy in the summer of 1946 when a plane failed to clear the hills behind the airfield and crashed with heavy loss of life. The need for a new airfield was generally recognised to enable Hong Kong to continue to hold its position as an important link in international air services. Work was begun near Ping Shan in the New Territories on the construction of a runway 6,000 feet by 150 feet, with room for extension. Discussion in London, however, revealed that a length of 8,500 feet and a width of 300 feet is required to conform to international standards. In February 1946, a mission on which were represented the Air Ministry, the Ministry of Civil Aviation and B.O.A.C. [British Overseas Aviation Corporation] arrived in the Colony to investigate. (17)

From the perspective of the British merchants in Hong Kong, the hope of Hong Kong's future lay in its role “in the international air services” that would reposition Hong Kong in the emerging transnational network of aviation. In the following seven years, from 1947 to 1954, intensive discussions

were held in London and Hong Kong to examine various plans to improve Hong Kong's aviation facility. Altogether four documents were produced that shaped the direction of the deliberation: the Broadbent report (1951), the Scott and Wilson report (1953), the interdepartmental committee report (1953), and the "Memorandum of June 1954" by the Colonial Secretariat of Hong Kong. In the end, the British government decided to expand Kai Tak Airport rather than build a new airport in places such as Stonecutters Island, Deep Bay, and Stanley. The decision to drop plans for building a new airport was based on a variety of reasons, including costs (the Stonecutters Island plan and the Stanley plan) and strategic considerations (the Deep Bay plan).

In the documents, especially the "Memorandum of June 1954," expanding Kai Tak Airport was deemed the pragmatic solution to the British challenges in regaining control of Hong Kong. First, the planned public project would improve the British image, which gave the impression that the British wanted to enhance Hong Kong's security by aligning it with the empire's air defense system. Second, the planned public project would revitalize Hong Kong's economy when the new aircraft technology reached the point of replacing propeller-driven aircrafts with more efficient, long-range jet planes, potentially expanding the network of aerial transportation to reach places farther away.<sup>14</sup> In the documents, we see that the discussions went through three stages—comparing different plans (the Broadbent report), focusing on refurbishing Kai Tak Airport (the Scott and Wilson report), and deciding on the scale and the finance of the proposed project (interdepartmental committee report). Signaling the end of the deliberation, the "Memorandum of June 1954" summarized various reports and announced the British Government's decision.

In retrospect, even though the Broadbent report of 1951 was aimed at comparing various plans, it already set the tone of the debate by suggesting an innovative way to expand Kai Tak Airport. According to the report:

The first phase of development envisages the construction of a new instrument runway 9,000 ft. long on a bearing of 145° true from a point at the northern boundary of the existing aerodrome and extending into the sea for a distance of approximately 5000 ft. In addition, it is proposed to reclaim a small area of Kowloon Bay at the south-western extremity of the aerodrome for the construction of the new terminal building. (Broadbent, 5).

14 For the significance of this technological breakthrough, see Vowinckel (2012, 181–98).

This suggestion helped to solve the topographic challenges of Kai Tak Airport which was surrounded by mountains in the north and in the east. The mountainous terrain, the report said, severely limited the accessibility of the existing airport which had two short and narrow runways cutting across each other like a pair of scissors. The only way to solve the problem was to build a new runway extending into the sea. "To the south," the report said, "Hong Kong Island, with peaks of from 1500 to 1700 feet, effectively limits aircraft approaches at low altitude, except for a narrow gap 600 yards wide at Lei Y Mun [or Lei Yue Mun]" (Broadbent, 3). Although narrow, the Lei Yue Mun Gap would give enough room for aircraft to take off, heading toward the open sea. The report also suggested taking advantage of the topography to the west. The report said: "To the west the town of Kowloon and a small hill 400 feet high in the centre of Kowloon Peninsula present the only immediate obstruction, and further to the west Tsing [Yi] Island rises to approximately 1100 feet at a distance of 6 miles" (Broadbent, 3). This topography, with slight moderation, would allow an approach to the airport "the least obstructed by high ground" (Broadbent, 3).

Even though the Broadbent Report was noncommittal as to building a new airport or refurbishing Kai Tak, its final paragraph was revealing in terms of the Cold War geopolitics. It said:

No matter what improvements or developments are undertaken at Kai Tak, occasion will arise when the combination of tropical storms and mountainous terrain will cause a temporary closure of the airport. In these circumstances suitable diversion airports are a necessity. In the past this has presented no serious difficulty, since suitable airports were available on the Chinese mainland at Canton, 75 nautical miles distance from Hong Kong, and Swatow 150 nautical miles distance. These airports are not now available, and the nearest diversion airport is at Tainan (Formosa), a distance of 335 nautical miles. Many difficulties exist for the planning of diversionary operations to the airport, but it is considered that efforts should be made to make Tainan fully and readily available for civil aircraft diverted from Hong Kong. (Broadbent,11)

This concluding paragraph points to the recent changes in geopolitics after the People's Republic of China (PRC) entered the Korean War in 1950. After the PRC's entry into the war, an embargo was laid on the country by the United States and the United Nations, severely weakening Hong Kong's role as an entrepôt to China trade. Consequently, the iron curtain spread from the European continent to East Asia. For instance, Lo Wu, the border

between Hong Kong and Guangdong, became a new frontline of the Cold War. With strict control of movement, the border divided people on both sides of Lo Wu River, separating those in the north as the communists and those in the south as the free people. In this context, the Broadbent report was right to stress the necessity of connecting Hong Kong to a different aviation network, however inconvenient it might be. In terms of aviation, Hong Kong could no longer rely on the old network that connected the city to nearby Chinese cities such as Guangzhou and Shantou. To survive in the new geopolitical environment, Hong Kong must join the aviation network of the Western bloc, starting with Tainan Airport of the Republic of China and extending to Tokyo in Japan and Manila in the Philippines. Even in distress or emergency, aircraft flying to and from Hong Kong should not seek help from mainland airports; instead, they looked for help in airports that were further away. The cunning of the Cold War was that it separated what used to be close and united what was previously far apart.

Fortunately, in civil aviation there was a solution to this inconvenient change to the world map. The new jets—promising to be faster, more gas efficient, fly longer ranges, and carry more passengers and cargo—were ready for the market. The extension of Kai Tak runway would not only make the airport a state-of-the-art facility, it would also be a preparation for the dawn of the jet age.<sup>15</sup> The runway would reorient Hong Kong toward the direction of Tainan, and from there connect to Tokyo in Japan, Sydney in Australia, Honolulu and San Francisco in the United States, and Frankfurt and Paris in Europe.

Keeping in mind this repositioning of Hong Kong, it makes sense that in the Scott and Wilson report (1953) and the interdepartmental committee report (1954) the focus of the debate shifted to how to build and finance a new runway. The speed with which the decision was made was stunning. In two years, officials in London were ready to commit a huge sum—100 million US dollars—to rebuild Kai Tak Airport. Indeed, there was an urgency to make a decisive move. In 1954, as opposed to 1951, Cold War geopolitics had become more conflictual and contentious. For example, refugees crossed the borders to enter Hong Kong every day, causing social problems and law and order issues. Hong Kong quickly became a refuge for refugees seeking freedom and welfare. This “problem of the people,” as Mark describes it, became so severe that it caught the attention of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (2007, 145–81). When the Cold War was causing

15 For a discussion of the concept of the jet age and its relation to building airports and airport cities, see Bednarek (2016, 1–8).

not just voracious ideological debates but also pressing social problems in Hong Kong, it rendered the expansion of Kai Tak Airport a top public works priority that had to be completed as soon as possible.

Globally speaking, the early 1950s was the time when Western cities competed to build airports for the dawn of the jet age. While the British officials in London were debating on plans to extend Kai Tak runway, work had already been undertaken to expand Orly in Paris, Idlewild (later renamed as JFK) in New York, and O'Hare in Chicago. Timewise, the extension of Kai Tak runway (not to mention the expansion of the entire airport) rendered Hong Kong a bit late in competing for the jet air market. Yet, from the perspective of an East Asian city far away from the lucrative trans-Atlantic routes, Hong Kong was still well positioned to take part in the global competition. At least the direction was right. Rather than remaining in the declining East Asian market served by propeller-driven aircraft, Hong Kong made a leap into the future by joining the global aviation market driven by the jet planes.

To join the jet age, the length of the new Kai Tak runway mattered. In the Scott and Wilson report (1953), the colonial secretariat summarized a detailed plan of building a new runway:

Briefly, the scheme envisaged the building of a promontory into Kowloon Bay some 9,200 feet in length and 1,060 feet in width, extending from a reclamation near the shore to Channel Rock and pointing out through Lei U Mun [or Lei Yue Mun] passage. The terminal facilities and administrative buildings were to be grouped partly on shore and partly on the reclamation at the northern end of the runway. Both existing runways would be abandoned; some 170 acres of the present airfield thereby becoming available for re-development. The new airport would be as near to I.C.A.O [International Civil Aviation Organization] standards and recommended practices as was possible in Hong Kong and within acceptable limits. It would take 5 to 7 years to complete. It was claimed that it would be able to handle all types of aircraft likely to be flying in the next 20 years, and perhaps even longer. (1–2)

The last line of the summary is significant. The sentence encapsulated the expectation of building a runway extending into the open sea. Despite its awkward angle, the new runway (fig. 9.1) was going to lead Hong Kong into the bright future of civil aviation—serving “all types of aircraft likely to be flying in the next 20 years, and perhaps ever longer.” In 1953, however, there was no clear indication as to which type of aircraft would kick off the jet age. The British prototype, Comet I, was unreliable and unsafe, as shown in a disastrous

crash in 1952. It was not until 1958, with the successful launch of the Boeing 707, that the long-awaited jet age began (Schwartz 2020, 4–5). Still, the length of the new Kai Tak Airport was sufficient for the Boeing 707. Airlines might not use British aircrafts that the London officials preferred, but they were ready to send their jet planes to Kai Tak Airport because of its long runway.

The Scott and Wilson report had an ominous warning. The engineers foresaw a structural limitation of the single runway when only one aircraft could take off or touch down at a time. According to Scott and Wilson, this structural limitation would restrict “the capacity of the airport” and limit “the terminal facilities that would be required in the future” (13). Yet, the engineers remained optimistic. They said:

To sum up, the topography of the site limits the layout to one effective runway, but within this limitation the airport could be developed in the future to enable this runway to operate to full capacity, subject of course to restrictions imposed by the weather. The present layout proposals are, we understand, the minimum that are likely to meet the needs of the new airport in the years immediately following its construction. (13)

Although manageable in the short run, the structural limitation of a single runway would eventually hurt the development of Kai Tak Airport. During the 1980s, when airports in many Western cities became airport cities to include a conference facility, retail chain stores, children’s playgrounds, and haute-cuisine restaurants, there was no way Kai Tak Airport could compete. Its size was too small, and Kowloon Bay did not have room for another runway.

Yet, in 1954, when the British officials were making their decision, they were optimistic and hopeful. Even today when we read the “Memorandum of June 1954,” we can still sense the optimism that the British officials must have had. Without hesitation, officials in London committed to spending a huge sum of money to expand Kai Tak Airport. More importantly, they were certain that the expansion of Kai Tak Airport would remake Hong Kong into a hub of transnational air traffic, drastically transforming the city’s role in the global economy. For this reason, in the memorandum, the chief secretariat of Hong Kong made extra efforts to explain the intent of the government’s decisions:

These decisions will mean that, subject to a resolution to be introduced shortly into Legislative Council, Hong Kong will proceed to build an airport which accommodates all types of trunk route aircraft now operating

(except the temporarily suspended Comet I) with an appreciable increase in the safety factor and usability, and there is reason to suppose, on the basis of present information, that the Britannia should be able to have full use of the developed airport. There is some reason for hope that the northwest curved approach, coupled with the difficult topography, will not prove too restrictive for the operation of Comet II and Comet III aircraft, but this cannot be decided until operational data and experience have been gained ... Quite apart from these considerations, however, it is the Government's view that the development of Kai Tak as now proposed is essential to meet the needs of regional air services. (3)

In the end, structurally limited or not, the single runway was the hope of remaking Hong Kong during the Cold War. In life and in imagination, the single runway was a bridge leading Hong Kong out of China trade and inserting it into the transnational network of civil aviation.<sup>16</sup>

In the history of Hong Kong aviation, the starting day of Hong Kong's aeromobility was 12 September 1958, when the new runway was officially opened by the Hong Kong governor, Sir Robert Black (1906–99). Besides officially declaring the opening of the runway, the ceremony also highlighted the attractiveness of Hong Kong as a hub of the burgeoning aviation industry. In the ceremony, almost all of the most advanced aircraft were present, including the Douglas DC-3 (owned by Cathay Pacific Airways), the Stratocruiser (owned by Pan American World Airways), the Constellation (owned by Air India International), the Britannia (owned by Canadian Pacific Air Lines), and, above all, the most advanced jet plane at the time, the Comet IV (owned by British Overseas Airways Corporation) (“Official Opening of Hong Kong Airport”). By anchoring the opening ceremony with an air show, the Hong Kong government affirmed that the Kai Tak runway would make Hong Kong a member of the Western bloc in aeromobility.

## The Jet Age

Whereas a runway symbolizes accessibility, a terminal represents a gateway to a cosmopolitan city. In a 1959 movie, *Air Hostess* (Kongzhong xiaojie 空中

<sup>16</sup> This reorientation of Hong Kong into the transnational aviation network simultaneously cut Hong Kong off from the transnational aviation network of the Eastern bloc. The Eastern bloc (which included China) operated its own planes and routes. For the Eastern bloc aviation network and aircrafts, see Vowinckel (2012, 185–87).

小姐) directed by Wen Yi, Hong Kong was presented as a cosmopolitan city through an imagined airport. Starring Grace Cheng and Julie Yeh Feng, the protagonists in the movie were air hostesses who passed through airports around the world. In the movies, the air hostesses were local Chinese, young and good looking. They were professionally trained and internationally connected. In passing through airports (including an imagined Hong Kong Airport), they personified the cosmopolitanism and mobility that civil aviation promised. In several crucial scenes of the movie, an imagined Hong Kong airline, IAL (standing for International Air Lines), is shown operating flights to cities in East and Southeast Asia. And in the imagined Hong Kong terminal, several real-life airlines are present, such as Cathay Pacific Airways (CPA), Japan Air Lines (JAL), Hong Kong Airways Ltd (HKA), and British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC). In fleeting seconds on the silver screen, the presence of these airlines reinforced the image of Hong Kong as a gateway to global connectivity. The cinema audience could see the possibility to “Fly BOAC to London,” as a commercial in the imagined airport announced. They could also feel the excitement of “Going Places? Fly BOAC” as an advertisement in the hallway of the proposed airport.

Happily, the imagined world in *Air Hostess* matched the real world. In 1961, a year before the opening of the new terminal, the *Annual Report* of the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce provided concrete figures to elucidate the rapid growth of the Hong Kong air traffic:

During 1961, the amount of passenger, freight, and mail traffic passing through Hong Kong Airport continued its steady increase, and the number of passengers arriving and departing has risen to a figure approximately six times that of only ten years ago. More than half the scheduled services operating through the Colony are now operated by the most modern types of jet aircraft, such as the Convair 880, Boeing 707, Douglas DC 8 and Comet IV, and with the increased speed and range of these aircraft, Hong Kong has drawn correspondingly closer to the rest of the world. A flight to Tokyo which a few years ago might have taken about eight hours, can now be completed in just over three hours, and flight times on all other routes have been similarly reduced. Nineteen international airlines now operate scheduled flights to and from the Colony, with a frequency of some 290 flights each week, in addition to numerous charter flights by independent operators. (18)

From this report, we can see that by 1961 Hong Kong had firmly secured its “position on the commercial routes of the world” (as Sir Robert Black would

be quoted as saying at the opening of the Kai Tak terminal a year later). Of course, “the world” here meant the Western bloc cities which long-range aircraft could reach. “The world” also meant people who had the means to travel by plane. Nevertheless, in the early 1960s, Hong Kong had been fully integrated into the world of aeromobility connected by jet planes. When the new terminal of Kai Tak Airport was opened in 1962, Sir Robert Black, the Hong Kong governor, confidently declared that the new terminal made Hong Kong a major player in global aviation. In *Portifact*, the Scott and Wilson Kirkpatrick & Partners House Magazine, a reporter commented positively on Sir Black’s speech:

He said that in its new airport Hong Kong had achieved something singular and outstanding, providing conclusive evidence in support of the continuing importance of Hong Kong’s position on the commercial routes of the world. The new terminal confirmed that Hong Kong was in the forefront of providing for air travel and the present building might only give a short breathing space before extensions were required. (31–33)

The last sentence of the report forcefully reiterated the new status of Hong Kong as a hub of the global aviation network. It also inserts a proactive attitude, expecting further expansion to be taken to keep abreast with changes in aircraft technology and consumption patterns. This proactive attitude was a characteristic of aeromobility in which the sky is deemed limitless.

In the same year, the *Annual Report* of the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce provided a detailed description of the new terminal, giving us a glimpse of its cosmopolitan appeal:

The year 1962 was marked, in November, by the long-awaited opening of the new Airport Terminal Building. Of pleasing, though functional, design, the building has since drawn favourable comment from aviation experts in many parts of the world. Many new features have been incorporated in the new building, with a view to eliminating those irritating delays to which air travellers are on occasion subjected. Departing passengers drive up a fly-over road to first floor level, where the baggage weigh-in counters are situated. From these counters they move to a large and comfortable waiting lounge, containing shops, two buffet restaurants, a post office and cable bureau. Announcements are made over closed circuit television, as well as through a large number of speakers of the modern public address system. Arriving passengers are processed entirely at ground floor level,

where left luggage, hotel reservation and car-hire facilities are available. The entire building is sound-proofed and airconditioned to provide cool air in summer and warm air in winter. (18)

From its exterior design to the facilities inside the building, the newly refurbished Kai Tak Airport was decidedly functional rather than ornately monumental. This functional style fit the general pattern of airports in Europe, the United Kingdom, and the United States, which were built with the intention to be expanded later to keep pace with the new aviation technology. Like other airports in the Western bloc, Kai Tak Airport was designed to facilitate the “fluid motion” of passengers and cargoes. It was a non-place that made global travelers feel at home while transiting from one city to another.<sup>17</sup> The editor of the 1962 report made this point clear with concrete figures:

Large though the new Terminal is, work has already commenced on its extension to accommodate the constantly increasing number of air travellers passing through its doors. Over eighty percent of Hong Kong’s visitors arrived by air, and 22 international airlines operated more than 300 scheduled services each week in order to cater to their needs, in addition to numerous charter flights by independent operators. (18)

From 1962 to 1967 (the year when riots broke out in Hong Kong), the number of air travelers passing through Kai Tak Airport continued to grow annually. Concomitantly, air freight services increased by leaps and bounds when Hong Kong was morphed into a light-industry powerhouse producing textiles, outwear, plastic flowers, plastic toys and dolls, shirts, shoes, electric torches, transistor radios, enamel ware, imitation jewelry and rattan furniture.<sup>18</sup> Of course, not all export items were shipped by air, but air traffic assisted the expansion of Hong Kong industry when investors and customers abroad could fly to Hong Kong to meet with suppliers, negotiate contracts, and examine samples.<sup>19</sup>

17 For a discussion of the functional and provision design of airports in the 1950s and 1960s, see Schwartz (2020, 20–22).

18 The 1964 *Annual Report* of the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce gives a long list of Hong Kong exports to Western countries (21).

19 To affirm the prominent role of the airport, the cover of the 1964 *Annual Report* of the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce featured photos of Victoria Harbor and Kai Tak Airport. According to *Annual Report*: “Kai Tak Report, which accounts for over 88% of tourists, and nearly all businessmen visiting the Colony, saw a steady increase of traffic throughout the year” (14).

In one area particularly, the Hong Kong Airport directly facilitated the industrialization of Hong Kong—tourism. The introduction of bigger and long-range jet planes meant that tourism, including package tours, was possible. The Hong Kong Tourist Association (HKTA), founded in 1957, was instrumental in advertising Hong Kong to Western tourists. Since the early 1960s, HKTA set up offices in cities in the United States and Australia to promote Hong Kong as a delightful place to visit. In many years, images of Kai Tak Airport were featured in tourist guidebooks to promote Hong Kong as a tourist haven. To develop tourism, the HKTA assisted in hosting the 1965 conference of the American Society of Travel Agents. Attended by 2,112 visitors, many of whom were active travel agents, the conference put Hong Kong on the map of the global tourist industry (HKTA *Annual Report* 1965–66, 13.).

In the early 1960s, there were two art works that captured the cosmopolitanism and mobility represented by Kai Tak Airport. One was a 1961 drawing by a Chinese American artist, Dong Kingman (1911–2000). Commissioned by the HKTA, Dong drew four posters and a landscape painting in 1961 to promote Hong Kong to Western travelers. The four posters that Dong drew depicted glimpses of daily life in Hong Kong including the busy Pottinger Street in the Central District, a view of Hong Kong Island from Kowloon, Moon Festival in Hong Kong, and Noon Day Gun in Causeway Bay (Bailey 2017, 21–24). Compared to other posters which dwelled on the conventional themes of the hustle and bustle in Hong Kong, the landscape painting “The British Crown Colony of Hong Kong” was thoughtful, daring, and inspiring (Bailey 2017, 21–24). Rather than focusing on Hong Kong Island (such as the panoramic view of the Victoria Harbor from the Peak), Dong took an unusual vantage of looking at Hong Kong from the north. Viewing Hong Kong from the perspective of the New Territories which was geographically linked to mainland China, Dong relegated Hong Kong Island to the background, yielding the center stage to Kowloon Peninsula, and particularly Kai Tak Airport. By centering on Kai Tak Airport and its long runway, the focal point of the artwork was an incoming airplane preparing to land at the airport. Taking an artist’s license, Dong made the Lei Yue Mun Gap unusually large, transforming it from a narrow passage into a gigantic opening to the blue ocean. In this creative rendition of the Hong Kong map, the airport, the descending plane, and the blue ocean formed a unity evoking deep meanings. On the one hand, mainland China (the enemy zone) was implied but hidden due to the north-south perspective. On the other hand, a sense of freedom was evoked when the long runway of Kai Tak airport pointed at the misty blue ocean lying beyond the wide-open Lei Yue Mun Gap.

Like Dong's evocation of mobility and openness in remapping Hong Kong, the movie *L'inconnue de Hong Kong* (1963) directed by Jacques Poitrenaud provided visual images that showed the cosmopolitanism on the streets of Hong Kong. Set in an imaginary trip to Hong Kong, the characters in the movie fly to the city in a Boeing 707. Before landing, the plane circles over Hong Kong, giving the audience a panoramic view of the city's modernity. In so doing, the film maker makes the point that although the Pearl of the Orient might be in East Asia, it matched any Western city in terms of infrastructure and urban planning. In several episodes, the film maker went as far as to show that Hong Kong was not even Eastern in culture and languages. For instance, the main characters seemed to have no problem communicating with the locals using French or English. They lead a European lifestyle while staying in Hong Kong, such as eating meals with European table manners, driving Western cars, and drinking wine and liquor at Western-style bars at night.

Like Dong's poster, *L'inconnue de Hong Kong* was intended to be imaginative and suggestive. It was a work of art designed to provoke thought and inspire hope. At the same time, like Dong's poster, the movie also captured the milieu of the time, when 1960s Hong Kong was a fast-growing city with a robust manufacturing industry. Regardless of how unrealistic the movie might be at times, it glorified the vibrancy, accessibility, and infinite possibility that Hong Kong presented. The movie shows that the imagination of Hong Kong as a cosmopolitan city would not have been possible without Kai Tak Airport.

## The Age of the Jumbo Jet

This image of vibrancy, accessibility, and infinite growth of Hong Kong was again on display when the first Boeing 747 jumbo jet landed in Kai Tak Airport on 11 April 1970. Like in the past, the Kai Tak terminal was the focal point of this memorable day because it had recently been refurbished to service the giant aircraft. The *Annual Report* of the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce of that year included a detailed summary of the opening ceremony:

Facilities offered by Kai Tak are second to none in the Orient, and the importance of the airport to the Colony is shown by the fact that 2,324,900 passengers passed through it during the year. In order to cope with the increasing number of people using the Terminal Building, an extensive

programme of modifications was completed during the year, including enlargement of the building and its facilities and the installation of a mechanical baggage and distribution system. A pier and six aerobridges, suitable for use by aircraft up to the size of a Boeing 747, were also completed and brought into operation. The building is now capable of handling 2,200 passengers per hour. ... All the airport taxiways were widened in time for the advent of Boeing 747 services on April 11, Hong Kong being the fourth airport outside the USA to receive this type of aircraft. (20)

The key point of this report appears in the last sentence of the quoted paragraph. In that sentence, the author emphasizes the significance of the day, marking Hong Kong as “the fourth city outside the USA” receiving the new giant plane. That day ushered Hong Kong into the age of the jumbo jet ahead of many other cities.

In the jumbo jet age, when large numbers of people and cargo flew across the world every day, hour, and minute, the world shrank, and space was compressed by time. Simultaneously, this aura of cosmopolitanism and jet-set mobility was accompanied by a gathering cloud of uncertainty when the US economy was continuously hampered by hyperinflation and slow growth after the 1973 oil crisis when after the oil embargo by OPEC raised oil prices, energy costs drew up the production and labor costs, causing a cascading effect upon consumers' purchasing power. Being the biggest export market of Hong Kong, the slumbering demands of US customers significantly slowed the Hong Kong economy. In the *Annual Report* of the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce in the 1970s, we find consistent warnings of the effects of a slumbering US economy. In the 1977 *Annual Report* particularly, the Chairman of the General Chamber wrote, “United States economic recovery was slower than expected during 1977 and this in turn had an adverse effect on world trade in general. The critical influence of the US economy on the state of the world economy was well demonstrated during 1977 although it is also true to say that, in reverse, the failure of the European nations to bring inflation under satisfactory control with adverse effects on their economies probably had some effect on the rate of development of the US economy” (7). In the same report, the chairman of the chamber of commerce also noticed the similarly slumbering economy of the United Kingdom. The only bright spots were found in West Germany and Japan which continued to grow (7).

When the world was no longer primarily driven by the consumer markets in the US and the UK, Hong Kong industrialists had to diversify. One way to diversify was to shift the destination of their exports to other places in “the

world” where the consumption demands remained strong. In the aviation industry, this diversification of the consumer market led to the rise of a local airline in Hong Kong—Cathay Pacific Airways (or Cathay Pacific, in short). Originally founded in Shanghai in 1946 by Roy Farrell (an American) and Sydney de Kantzow (an Australian), Cathay Pacific grew from a small airline with a handful of aircraft in the 1940s to a medium-sized airline with a fleet of jetliners in the 1960s (Young 1988, 21–76). Having relocated to Hong Kong, Cathay Pacific always played second fiddle to the British Overseas Airway Corporation (BOAC) which dominated the market by monopolizing the flight routes between Hong Kong and the United Kingdom. But in 1959, Cathay Pacific found an opportunity to grow by absorbing Hong Kong Airways, a subsidiary of BOAC. The absorption helped Cathay Pacific rebrand as a local Hong Kong airline with a network of flight routes covering East and Southeast Asia.<sup>20</sup>

Having benefited from the expansion of the aviation industry sparked by the introduction of jumbo jets, Cathay Pacific expanded its routes to cover Australia and New Zealand in the early 1970s. In a highly synchronized advertisement campaign in 1974, Cathay Pacific commissioned a full-page advertisement in a Sydney newspaper. The advertisement said: “Today Cathay Pacific, Hong Kong’s beautiful airline, starts an exclusive service from and to Hong Kong. Three times weekly we’ll jet you to Hong Kong. From there to thirteen beautiful cities. Our experienced, reliable pilots and engineers are Australian and British. The best in the business. Our cabin staff are Asia’s finest. Our food and wine superb. Our service—out of this world” (Young 1988, 170). The purpose of this advertisement was branding—making a product attractive and memorable to the customers. As part of a promotional campaign, the Cathay Pacific advertisement highlighted the scope and scale of the airline. The advertisement promised that Cathay Pacific would “jet” passengers to wherever they wanted to go in the world via Kai Tak Airport, its home base. It also guaranteed safety and services. It promised to provide the best personnel to run the aircraft and the best food and wine on board. This combination of safety, experience, and local favors made Cathay Pacific a global airline with a hub in the heart of East Asia. Although boisterous in style and bombastic in tone, the advertisement encapsulated an image

20 The 1959 *Annual Report* of the Hong Kong General Chamber of Commerce mentions this momentous change in Cathay Pacific. In the summary, the report says, “Cathay Pacific Airways, Ltd and Hong Kong Airways, Ltd – combined under the name Cathay Pacific Airways Ltd, and is associated with B.O.A.C.” (19). Hence, Cathay Pacific became officially the local branch of BOAC in Hong Kong.

of a vibrant and accessible Hong Kong, like Dong Kingman's painting, and the movie, *L'inconnue de Hong Kong*.

This broad, wide-open image of Hong Kong was put to music when Cathay Pacific partnered with EMI in 1974 and 1978 to produce two albums of folk songs of countries and cities that Cathay Pacific served. Sung by the singer Ms. Frances Yip (Lai Yi) in the native languages of the various places, the songs in the two albums were a showcase of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism. For instance, the 1974 album *Discovery 1* included: "Arirang" (Korea), "Kassai" (Japan), "Green is the Mountain" (Taiwan), "Dahil Sa Iyo" (Philippines), "Rasa Sayang Eh" (Malaysia), "Bua Khao" (Thailand), "Saigon" (Vietnam), "Bengawan Solo" (Indonesia), "Di Tanjong Katong" (Singapore), and "Waltzing Matilda" (Australia). In addition, there were three songs specially written for the album: "Discovery," "Kowloon Hong Kong Medley," and "More than You'll Bargain." While one hears the voices of diverse cultures and societies in these folk songs, one also hears the joy of vibrancy, mobility, and infinite possibility in the three newly composed songs.

The theme song of the album, "Kowloon Hong Kong Medley," was particularly effective in conveying the aura of openness and mobility. Composed by Alfonso S. Garcia, the lyrics are energetic, enthusiastic, and entertaining:

You've been around, seeing plenty of town, baby what are you looking for?  
You'll find more than you bargained for, when you go Hong Kong.

Shopping in places, seeing beautiful faces, and talking the language you know  
You'll find more than you bargained for, when you go Hong Kong.

Find yourself a private island, where you can hide away.  
You can see Macao and China, it's not very far away.

Nights and lights swing like the town you'd be aglow.  
You'll find more than you bargained for, when you go  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong  
Xiang Gang (Hong Kong in Mandarin), Heung Gong (Hong Kong in  
Cantonese)  
Hong Kong, Hong Kong. (*Discovery 1*)

What we find in the lyrics is a city of diversity. It was no longer the stand-alone entity Hong Kong of the 1950s or the light-industry powerhouse made



Figure 9.1. A picture of a Cathay Pacific jumbo jet flying over Hong Kong Island at sunset. Half hidden at the lower right corner is the picture of the singer Frances Yip who sang the folk songs in *Discovery II* in native languages of the places. Source: *Discovery II*, EMI (photographed by the author).

in Hong Kong of the 1960s. Instead, it was a multifaceted and culturally diverse Hong Kong where everyone would feel at home. Depending on one's language preferences, Hong Kong could be called Hong Kong in English, *xiang gang* in Mandarin, or *heung gong* in Cantonese. The diverse ways to pronounce Hong Kong show that the city was a place with many identities and potentialities. In there, everyone would find a niche, especially those who dared to expect the unexpected.

On the inner pages of the 1978 *Discovery 2* album, there were, as usual, photos of the singer and commercial logos. Expectedly, airplanes feature prominently in the background, as the purpose of the album was to promote the services of Cathay Pacific. Of these airplane photos, there is one that stands out. The photo depicts a jumbo jet ascending to the sky above Hong Kong Island under the glow of a setting sun. Judging by the position of the ascending jumbo jet, the plane must have been taking off from Kai Tak Airport, on its way to pass through the Lei Yue Mun Gap. Yet, unlike the painting by Dong Kingman or the movie *L'inconnue de Hong Kong*, the runway and the terminal of Kai Tak do not appear in the photo. The focus of the photo is the ascending giant aircraft, on its way to reach a faraway destination. If we juxtapose the ascending aircraft with the city underneath it, we can almost hear in our ears the lyrics of "Kowloon Hong Kong," particularly the line "Nights and lights swing like the town you'd be aglow." If a picture can tell a thousand words, this picture shows that by following the flight paths of Cathay Pacific's flights, we will find a world shrunk in space and shortened in time.

## From Kai Tak to Chek Lap Kok

From the above, we have seen momentous changes in the image of Kai Tak Airport. It began as a public project of building a runway, and was turned into a commitment to continue modifying the airport terminal to keep pace with the aviation technology and travelers' needs. Finally, in the mid-1970s, it was transformed into a sign of global connectivity and multiculturalism. In the complex world of the market economy, we can never tell exactly what led to these changes. What we know is that the image of Kai Tak Airport became increasingly abstract as years went by. In 1978, Kai Tak Airport became a symbol for where jumbo jets landed or took off, rather than a real place where real people worked.

Being abstract does not mean that Kai Tak Airport was no longer important in global aviation. What it means is that, by the late 1970s, its potential to provoke thought and generate expectation was limited due to the changes in geopolitics and the global economy. At the end of the 1970s, businessmen and investors in Hong Kong found a new driver of growth—post-Mao China that was opening for trade and exchanges. In the following two decades, this new player would jolt the global economy as the Cold War in Europe was winding down.

As the center of gravity of the global economy shifted from the blue ocean beyond Lei Yue Mun Gap to the vast country north of Kowloon Bay, the fortunes of Kai Tak Airport diminished. Even though Kai Tak Airport continued to operate for two more decades before being replaced by Chek Lap Kok International Airport in Lantau Island, its days were numbered in the early 1980s. Its structural limitation, clearly highlighted in the Scott and Wilson report, finally caught up with it. Regardless of how inspiring it was when the runway pointed at the sea, the limited scale of Kai Tak Airport could not match the rapid demands for air travel to and from China. When bigger and more commercially diverse airport cities (such as O'Hare in Chicago and Schiphol in Amsterdam) became the norm of global aviation during the 1990s, Kai Tak Airport became outdated due to the limitations of space and its precarious location. Eventually it had to become a memory of the past. Although built by the British before they left in 1997, the new Chek Lap Kok International Airport faces north toward the Greater Bay Area of Guangdong, rather than facing south toward the blue ocean behind Hong Kong Island. Indeed, space is produced to represent changes in time. The direction of an airport has meanings far beyond the practical needs for aircraft to land or to ascend. It signifies a new alignment of economic and political forces, manifesting a shift in the global system of production, consumption, and transportation.

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# Part 3

Singapore



# 10. Cityscape and Memoryscape: The Cold War and Monuments of Commemoration in Singapore

*Kevin Blackburn*

**Abstract:** From the 1940s to the 1960s, Singapore's cityscape was dotted with military bases which had accompanying deathscapes devoted to the war dead from both WWII and the Cold War. First there was the establishment of the Kranji War Cemetery and Memorial to the military war dead of WWII. At the same time in Singapore there were other cemeteries that were created as memoryscapes to the fallen in the Cold War—the Pasir Panjang and Ulu Pandan military cemeteries. With the end of empire and the exiting of the British from their Singapore military bases in the 1970s, the newly independent city-state of Singapore started to contest the use of these spaces by military cemeteries.

**Keywords:** Cold War, cemeteries, Singapore, deathscapes, memoryscapes, WWII

## Introduction

Much has been written and discussed regarding how Singapore's commemorative war monuments and deathscapes reflect the traumas and contested discourses of WWII (Muzaini and Yeoh 2016). Yet, surprisingly, these same memoryscapes that are principally dedicated to the war dead of WWII also provide connections to the traumas and discourses of the Cold War and how they have been remembered and contested in Singapore. The creation of these monuments and deathscapes to WWII was shaped by the context of the Cold War. It is largely overlooked that Singapore's deathscape

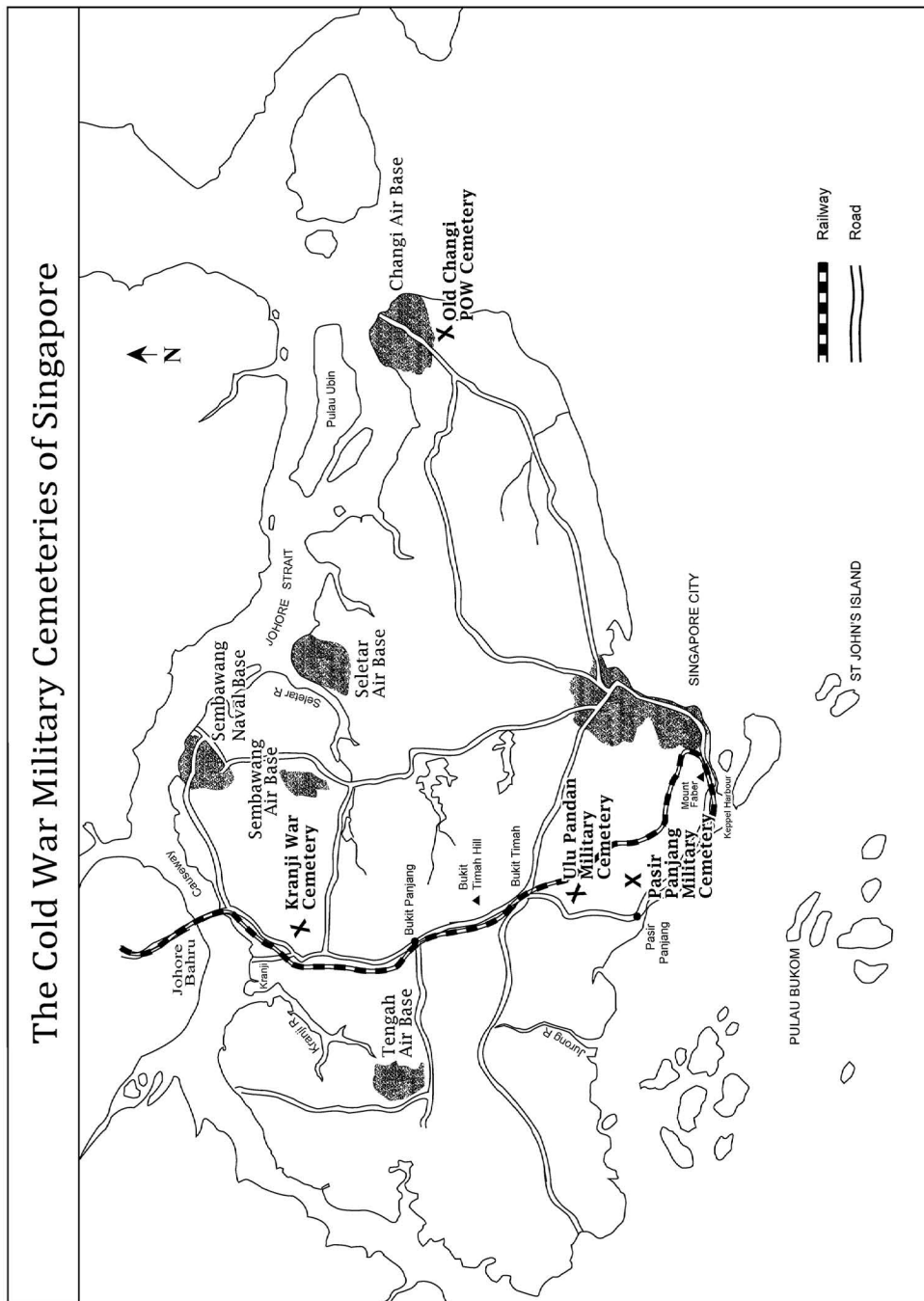


Figure 10.1. The Cold War military cemeteries of Singapore (drawn by the author, 2024, based on Google Maps).

to the war dead of WWII at Kranji is also its principal deathscape to the war dead of the Cold War (Bose 2006). Lying next to the war dead of WWII are the graves of the dead of the Cold War (see fig. 10.1). It has the graves of 417 of the war dead of the Malayan Emergency (1948–60), fought by the British Commonwealth forces against the communist guerrillas in Malaysia (Plant 2019, 373–90). Yet, their stories remain silenced in a society in which remembering the Cold War, with its distinctions between communist and noncommunist in Singapore history, has been divisive. How did the Cold War shape the commemoration of war in Singapore and how have the contested memories of the Cold War continued to shape commemoration at the site?

### **Creating a Memoryscape to the War Dead of WWII during the Cold War**

Singapore's principal memoryscape to the war dead is located at its Kranji area and is effectively divided into several cemeteries. What is known as the Kranji War Cemetery contains the graves of the fallen of WWII. Within this area is the Singapore Memorial which lists the names of 24,000 killed in Southeast Asia during WWII and who have no known graves. Adjacent is what is known as the Kranji Military Cemetery, which contains mainly the graves of service men and women and members of their families who died during the period of the Cold War, from the 1940s to the 1960s. This military cemetery was created in the 1970s when the Singapore government demanded that the former Cold War Pasir Panjang and Ulu Pandan military cemeteries be exhumed as they were located in areas planned for urban development. Many graves were moved to what is now called the Kranji Military Cemetery section of the Kranji memoryscape to the war dead.

It is worth exploring how strong Kranji's connection to the WWII dead has been in Singapore by giving an account of its historical origins. The Kranji memoryscape started as a cemetery for a prisoner of war (POW) camp. Kranji was both a hospital camp and a labor camp of 1,020 British, Australian, and Dutch POWs, who were forced to build defenses for the Japanese military but given very little food. The conditions were bad at the camp, resulting in so many deaths that after the war its Japanese commandant was tried and convicted of war crimes. The commandant was thirty-two-year-old Staff Sergeant Yoshikawa Taira, a former architect in civilian life, who was only given four years imprisonment because he could not be connected directly to the relatively high number of deaths in the camp. From 28 May 1944, when the POW camp was set up, to 20 August 1945, when it was liberated

after the Japanese surrender, seventy-nine POWs died of diseases related to poor conditions, ill-treatment, and malnourishment, as little food was provided and medical assistance was negligible.<sup>1</sup> Kranji had a small POW cemetery when compared to the POW cemeteries at the main POW camp at Changi, where most of the prisoners were held. By the end of the war, at Changi POW camp 809 POWs were buried in its cemeteries (Bryan 1946, 66).

For war grave designers in the Imperial War Graves Commission, Changi, not Kranji, seemed to be the most natural site for a cemetery for the war dead of WWII. The location looked out onto the sea and had immense emotional significance to the POWs, as every person buried in the cemeteries had been given a burial with a full ceremony and the grounds were well curated. The Japanese had used the POWs at Changi to build an airfield near the camp, which was very near the POW cemeteries. Postwar Singapore remained an integral part of the defense of the British Empire and the decision was taken by the Royal Air Force to expand the military airfield that the Japanese had built. This meant removing the POW cemeteries from Changi. Athanasios Tsakonas, in his account of the creation of the Kranji Memorial and War Cemetery, describes how, although the Imperial War Graves Commission insisted on having the Changi POW cemeteries as the site of the envisioned cemetery to the war dead of WWII, it was vehemently opposed by the Royal Air Force, which wanted to expand the Changi airfield built by the Japanese into a major military base for the future defense of Singapore. In early 1946, the defense needs of the empire in the postwar period won over the emotional significance of the Changi site.

Kranji had been well down the list of potential sites drawn up by the two Imperial War Graves Commission assessors—Brigadier Harry Naismith Obbard and Major Colin St Clair Oakes, who preferred Changi—of potential sites visited in Singapore in January 1946. For them, Kranji had no “historical association” with major events of the wartime past in Singapore, which is what they were looking for when establishing war cemeteries for the Imperial War Graves Commission (Tsakonas 2020, 145). Nonetheless, Kranji was chosen by the South East Asia Command because of the opposition by the Royal Air Force to having Changi as the deathscape, or cemetery, of the war dead. By April 1946, work had begun on making Kranji the principal war cemetery of Singapore and other WWII graves scattered around Singapore began to be moved there. However, Kranji in its early days was not a popular site for such an important war cemetery. According to Tsakonas, the decision

1 Defendant: Yoshikawa Taira. Place of Trial: Singapore, WO 235/841 (The National Archives, United Kingdom).

to make it so could have been reversed during its first few years, as the Imperial War Graves Commission and key military figures who had visited Kranji continued to believe that the site did not have the sentimental and historical association that Changi had with the war (Tsakonas 2020, 160–61). Nonetheless, circumstances had ruled out Changi and made Kranji the best choice. By June 1948, the Cold War had come to Singapore and Malaya with the declaration of the Malayan Emergency against the communist insurrection.<sup>2</sup> In February 1949, the Royal Air Force began work on its expanded permanent runway at Changi. Changi Air Base would play a crucial role in helping the ground forces fight the communist guerrillas and bring in military supplies (Probert 1988, 67, 74). Obbard and Oakes started to favor the Kranji site given that Changi was not a possibility (Tsakonas 2020, 161).

In 1947, Oakes was appointed the architect of the cemetery layout and the memorial at Kranji to the 24,000 war dead in Southeast Asia during WWII with no known graves. Tsakonas in his architectural history of Kranji sees Oakes as shaping the memorial as an expression of modernism. The memorial appeared like a modern, gigantic airplane, with its inside walls inscribed with the names of the war dead with no known graves. Indeed, Tsakonas describes the design of the memorial as perhaps the result of Oakes being inspired by the silhouettes of the Hurricanes and Spitfires from the Battle of Britain (Tsakonas 2020, 178). This modernist monument was atop a hill situated next to a large traditional cross and surrounded by white tombstones in a very well-manicured English lawn. In the context of the Cold War in Southeast Asia, creating a modernist war memorial and cemetery jarred with colonial officials. At the center and apex of the airplane structure of the memorial, Oakes had designed a six-point star on top of an orb and glass dome lantern.

The fight against communism in the Malayan Emergency was uppermost on the minds of officials in the Colonial Office in London, so they read more into Oakes' modernist features for the Kranji Memorial and War Cemetery than Oakes himself had intended. In November 1956, the memorial was nearing completion for its unveiling in March 1957. Design plans of the star atop the monument reached J. B. Johnston, an official in the Colonial Office in London involved in organizing the unveiling ceremony of the monument. In a confidential minute he expressed his concern: "I must say I was extremely disconcerted to see that the central pylon of the whole scheme is surmounted

2 After WWII, Malaya and Singapore were separate political entities. They were briefly united with Sarawak and Sabah from 1963 to 1965 to form Malaysia. Singapore left Malaysia in 1965 and became an independent nation.

by the emblem of Communist China.”<sup>3</sup> Johnston and his colleague Ian Watt complained to the Imperial War Graves Commission about the lack of consultation with the Colonial Office over the design. Johnston ended his remarks to his Colonial Office colleagues sarcastically with the comment that there might be a good reason why the star was used, but “presumably it won’t be painted red.”<sup>4</sup> Watt also vehemently pursued his complaint with the Imperial War Graves Commission saying, “We wonder whether account has been taken of the possibility of the wrong significance being attached to the star on top of the central pylon by some elements in Singapore, since, as you know, a five-pointed star is the emblem of Communist China.” Watt concluded that “we cannot help wondering whether this particular aspect of the design might give the Communist elements in Singapore (who, as you know, are numerous and active) an opportunity of misrepresentation, or abuse.”<sup>5</sup> The representative of the Imperial War Graves Commission sent a close-up photograph of the star from the foundry in Britain where it was manufactured, and explained that it was not a five-point star but a six-point star that would be at the top of the memorial. Thus, it could not be interpreted as the communist star. Watt accepted the explanation but privately wrote to his fellow officials in the Colonial Office, “the star in the photo still looks like a five pointer to me.”<sup>6</sup>

While colonial officials in London were obsessed with imagined communist symbols, they were even more anxious about the potential political implications of the Kranji Memorial and War Cemetery being unveiled by a member of the royal family in a time of decolonization and the Cold War in Asia. The unveiling was to be carried out by the Duke of Gloucester, who, as well as being the head of the Imperial War Graves Commission, was also a member of the British royal family. Colonial officials were worried that this might stir up nationalist and communist discontent when negotiations were being conducted for future self-government for the colony of Singapore and the arrangements on independence for Malaya were being settled. Sir John MacPherson, who was overseeing the crisis in the Colonial Office regarding the imagined communist emblem on the Kranji memorial, was also at the center of imperial worries over the symbolism of a member of

3 J.B. Johnston, Sir J. McPherson, 30 November 1956, War Memorial Singapore, CO 1032/73 (The National Archives, United Kingdom).

4 J. B. Johnston, Sir J. McPherson, 30 November 1956.

5 Ian Watt to W.J. Chalmers, 4 December 1956, War Memorial Singapore, CO 1032/73 (The National Archives, United Kingdom).

6 Ian Watt, Mr. Johnston, 7 December 1956, War Memorial Singapore, CO 1032/73 (The National Archives, United Kingdom).

the royal family visiting Singapore at this crucial time during independence and self-government talks.

There was concern in the Colonial Office about visits of members of the royal family, especially since a visit to Singapore, in early November 1956, by the Duke of Edinburgh had only just been cancelled at short notice because of planned political protests against him. It was called off when the then communist-infiltrated People's Action Party (PAP) proposed to have its assembly members in parliament boycott events at which the Duke of Edinburgh was attending. The PAP Central Executive Committee, including its leader Lee Kuan Yew, declared in a written statement that the Duke of Edinburgh "is to colonial peoples of the empire, such as we in Singapore, a symbol of overlordship of the British raj." It further added: "Our fight for merdeka [independence] is one aspect of the fight against British overlordship" and that "When we attain merdeka we will welcome members of the royal family as a symbol of the bonds that held together free and independent members of the Commonwealth" (*Straits Budget* 25 October 1956). This period in 1956 when communist-inspired protests by trade unions and Chinese school students were used to destabilize the government was called the October Revolution. It failed, as the colonial government used its police force and 600 Gurkha troops transferred from the fighting in the Malayan Emergency to Singapore to help maintain order (Ramakrishna 2015, 42–46). The protests subsided through their dispersal by the strong-armed tactics of the police and the military. There were mass arrests and the use of physical force to counter violent demonstrations, but there was no armed uprising to fight against the military force. Singapore contrasted with Malaya, as the communist struggle in Singapore was not an armed insurrection like in Malaya but more akin to a united front strategy of infiltrating political parties and engaging in mass protests, demonstrations, and strikes (Clutterbuck 1973).

British officials in the Colonial Office as well as the governor of Singapore Robert Black feared that if the Duke of Gloucester came to Singapore to unveil the Kranji Memorial and War Cemetery that there would be a repeat of what had happened in October 1956 with the Duke of Edinburgh and that his visit would also have to be cancelled at short notice. The governor, when writing to the Colonial Office in November 1956, described the unstable political situation as the colonial authorities in Singapore sought to stem communist-inspired political activism, especially in the Chinese schools: "We are still in the middle, I might almost say at an early stage, of our struggle with the Chinese Middle Schools. I do not write off the possibility of further trouble in connection with the action that we may have to take.

There remains a feeling of tension arising out of the recent rioting and the action taken against the leaders of subversion.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, the governor advised: “We cannot rule out the possibility, also, that a visit by the Duke in February might have political repercussions, and, of course, it would be distressing if political factions in Singapore planned demonstrations or boycott, as they might well do, at the time of the Duke’s visit.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, upon the advice of the Governor of Singapore given the circumstances of Cold War Singapore, no British royalty came to unveil the Kranji War Cemetery and Memorial. The Governor did it himself on 2 March 1957. The monument that the Governor unveiled was indeed an imperial monument dedicated to the war dead of “the many races united in service to the British Crown.”

### Deathscapes for the Cold War Dead in Singapore

Despite its Cold War context, the Kranji deathscape was not meant as a cemetery to remember the war dead from the Cold War. It was strictly to remember the war dead of WWII. The war dead from the Malayan Emergency and other Cold War conflicts in Southeast Asia that the British Empire was fighting were buried first at the Pasir Panjang Military Cemetery on Dover Road, from when it was opened in 1948 to when it was closed in 1956. Then, in 1955, the Ulu Pandan Military Cemetery was opened to replace Pasir Panjang and remained in use until 1975. What were the circumstances of the Cold War dead buried in the military cemeteries of Singapore’s Cold War cityscape? What type of memoryscapes were they?

The Cold War dead being buried in the Pasir Panjang Military Cemetery during its early years reflected the contours of the Malayan Emergency. Historian Karl Hack describes vividly the nature of the conflict in its early years with a high number of fatalities as the British forces engaged in what he called “violent excesses” and later carried out bloody “counter-terror” measures against the communist forces and their supporters amongst the Chinese population. These measures were a continued mixture of domination by force and persuasion (Hack 2022, 3, 97). From its opening in 1948 to its closure in 1956, many of the tombstones of the Pasir Panjang Military Cemetery became monuments to the ferocity in which this Cold

7 Governor to Colonial Office, 10 November 1956, War Memorial Singapore, CO 1032/73 (The National Archives, United Kingdom).

8 Governor to Colonial Office, 10 November 1956, War Memorial Singapore, CO 1032/73 (The National Archives, United Kingdom).

War conflict was being fought. After deadly incidents, the British military would bury its own war dead in the military cemetery with some fanfare and their stories would be told in the English language press. While there were a number of major cemeteries established by the British in Malaysia for the war dead of the Malayan Emergency, the two in Singapore received the war dead who mainly fell in combat in the southern Malayan state of Johor, as there was no military conflict in Singapore itself.

The bloody nature of this Cold War conflict was reflected in the stories behind the wooden crosses and tombstones that were filling up the Pasir Panjang Military Cemetery. These included tombstones of officers who in the early years of the conflict threw caution to the wind when it came to their own personal safety and ran well ahead of the front lines of their own men in desperate acts to defeat a determined enemy. For these actions, they paid with their lives. The most well-known of these stories was that behind the tombstone of Captain Frederick Hambrook, of the First Seaforth Highlanders. His death on 17 November 1948 at the age of twenty-seven was lionized in Singapore's English press by a correspondent who had been in action with him a week before he was killed. Hambrook was shot dead by communist guerrillas at the seventh mile point of the Muar-Bakri Road in Johor. His story was entitled: "Captain Hambrook Met Hero's Death" (*Malaya Tribune* 23 November 1948). He had previously been awarded the Military Cross.

The correspondent began his story: "I knew Capt. Hambrook personally. His death came as a shock to me. I had always thought of him as foolhardy in the way he led his men in raids, but the manner of his death has revealed to me the excellent quality of leadership in him." He recalled the 12 November 1948 raid at the eighth mile point of the Muar-Lenga Road at which Hambrook "was leading an assault force and was always in front." The correspondent remembered: "On several occasions when I was within conversation range, I remarked that he was risking his life unnecessarily by going to the front." His answer was: "I am a soldier. My duty lies ahead. I am in front to lead and protect my men." The correspondent then concluded: "That answer typifies his courage, loyalty and devotion to duty without the least thought of himself" (*Malaya Tribune* 23 November 1948).

On 17 November 1948, Hambrook was at the front of his troops when he was shot and fell. The correspondent wrote: "He did not seek to lie low when wounded. He got up and led his men onwards with a wounded leg until he was shot down again." This time the spray of gunfire was fatal for Hambrook, while his second in command, Lieutenant Brown who was with him at the front, also fell seriously wounded with eight bullet wounds. Despite being rendered leaderless, Hambrook's men later managed to kill the leader of

the communist guerrillas, drive off the attackers, and recover ammunition left behind. The correspondent attributed their success to being inspired by Hambrook, arguing that “because of fine leadership, the rest fought back stubbornly and drove off the attackers” (*Malaya Tribune* 23 November 1948).

Exactly a year later, three British officers and a lance corporal were buried at the Pasir Panjang Military Cemetery, having died together in a single engagement with the enemy on 12 November 1949 in circumstances like those of Hambrook. The war dead included Major William Maxwell Campbell of the Queen’s Own Highlanders and Lieutenant John Nigel Rolls Hoare of the Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment). Both were attached to B company of the First Seaforth Highlanders. They were killed together with Lieutenant Michael Anderson and Lance Corporal George Mackay of this company of the First Seaforth Highlanders as it was overwhelmed by a larger force of communist guerrillas in overgrown rubber trees at Cha’ah in Johor.<sup>9</sup> Six of the communists were killed in the action (*Indian Daily Mail*, 15 November 1949).

These sorts of costly actions were common as the communist guerrillas were a force to be reckoned with in the early years of the Malayan Emergency. On 22 February 1951, in the swamps and jungles near Segamat, Johor, four privates and a sergeant were killed when a ten-man patrol from the Worcestershire Regiment was ambushed by a force of 100 communist guerrillas as the British patrol was being sent to investigate a burning truck. The next day, the bodies of Sergeant J. Rowley, and Privates Joseph Charles Banner, Raymond Harvey, Geoffrey Plant, and Donald Charles Walker were recovered and later buried in the Pasir Panjang Military Cemetery (*Straits Times* 26 February 1951).

The Pasir Panjang Military Cemetery during the Malayan Emergency was not a deathscape dedicated only to the memory of British soldiers, but also that of other Commonwealth forces who were buried in the cemetery. Their stories also reflected the ferocity with which the conflict was fought. On 17 November 1954, the English language press carried a story entitled: “Fijian Heroes Laid to Rest,” concerning five Fijian soldiers who had been killed in one costly ambush by thirty communist guerrillas at the Yong Peng River Estate in Johor on 14 November 1954 (*Singapore Standard* 17 November 1954). The eleven-man Fijian patrol not only ended up with five dead, but six Fijian soldiers were gravely wounded, of which three were classified as “dangerously ill” (*Straits Times*, 18 November 1954). The total war dead for

9 See the Roll of Honour for the war dead of the Malayan Emergency at <http://www.roll-of-honour.com/Databases/MalayaPostWW2/index.html>.

the First Battalion Fiji Infantry Regiment during its service in the Malayan Emergency from 1952 to 1956 was twenty-five, so to lose five in one day was particularly devastating. Privates M. Canavanus, I. Kasivo, V. Maralava, T. Tanicakau, and E. Qesavakatini were buried in the Pasir Panjang Military Cemetery on 16 November 1954 with full military honors. Two Fijian soldiers played the last post on their bugles, while among the Fijian mourners were Colonel T. C. Campbell, the commanding officer of the Fijian military forces, and Ratu J. A. R. Dovi, Deputy Secretary for Fijian Affairs from Fiji (*Straits Times* 17 and 18 November 1954).

The Pasir Panjang Military Cemetery also reflected the heavy reliance of the British Empire on Gurkha soldiers, comprising five out of the ten battalions available to the British imperial forces in the first year of the Malayan Emergency. Of the over 200 Gurkhas who were killed in the twelve years of the Malayan Emergency, eighty-six were buried in the Pasir Panjang Military Cemetery and its successor after 1955, the Ulu Pandan Military Cemetery. The rest were buried in Malaysia. The military cemeteries of Singapore reflected the ferocity of the battles that the Gurkhas were involved in. The Gurkhas were “high quality,” well-trained jungle warfare fighters that the communist guerrillas found hard to inflict heavy casualties upon (Short 2000, 226). But even they, like their British and Fijian counterparts, could sustain high casualties in single engagements with the communist guerrillas during the early years of the Malayan Emergency. On 2 May 1951, six Gurkhas from the Second King Edward VII's Own Gurkha Rifles were killed in a communist ambush while on patrol in the Segamat area of Johor. Four other Gurkhas in the same patrol were wounded. Soon after, all of the six dead were buried side by side in the Pasir Panjang Military Cemetery. The six buried at Pasir Panjang Military Cemetery were Riflemen Laliprasad Pun, Juthe Gurung, Karasing Rana, Kharakbahadur Pun, Megabhadur Gurung, and Nandabhadur Thapa (*Straits Times* 6 May 1951).

When the Pasir Panjang Military Cemetery was filled to capacity and closed in 1956, the Ulu Pandan Military Cemetery took over its function as Singapore's continuing memoryscape to the Cold War dead. These cemeteries in Singapore were the principal places for burying and commemorating the war dead of the Cold War among British and Commonwealth forces in Southeast Asia, not just for the military in Singapore and the neighboring state of Johor. Lieutenant Forbes Hugh Wallace, Second Battalion Sixth Queen Elizabeth's Own Gurkha Rifles, aged twenty-five, was killed in border action in the East Malaysian state of Sarawak on 18 August 1963 fighting armed Indonesian infiltrators. His body was flown to Singapore and buried in the Ulu Pandan Military Cemetery on 20 August 1963 with full military

honors (*Straits Times* 21 August 1963). Commonwealth Cold War dead were not just sent from Malaysia. Warrant Officer Kevin Conway, the first Australian soldier killed in the Vietnam War by the Vietcong communist guerrillas on 6 July 1964, aged thirty-five, was exhumed in South Vietnam and reburied at the Ulu Pandan Military Cemetery on 17 October 1964 with full military honors (*Straits Times* 17 October 1964).

The local Malay, Chinese, Indian, and Eurasian war dead in the armed forces and police who were killed in the conflict were mostly buried in local cemeteries by their families. The Pasir Panjang and Ulu Pandan military cemeteries remained the preserve of the foreign personnel who made up the Commonwealth military forces fighting the Malayan Emergency. These military cemeteries were thus remote from the local population, even more so than WWII Kranji War Cemetery and Memorial, which commemorated several local war dead who were either buried on the grounds or inscribed on the memorial to the war dead with no known graves.

Singaporeans were buried in the Ulu Pandan Military Cemetery, but it was rare, such as when Private David Goh Tai Seng of the Singapore Infantry Regiment was stabbed to death in an attempted robbery on 7 January 1962. On a Saturday night, Goh and his fiancée were held up by three robbers who tried to steal his gold engagement ring. On 9 January 1962, 250 officers and men of his First Battalion, Singapore Infantry Regiment attended his funeral (*Straits Times* 9 January and 14 February 1962). Other Singaporeans in the Singapore Infantry Regiment who died in accidents were also buried in the Ulu Pandan Military Cemetery, such as the well-known local athlete, Second Lieutenant Siak Kok Leng on 26 July 1963 and Private Sie Tiong Fatt, who died on 15 February 1960 (*Straits Times* 25 July 1963 and Commonwealth War Graves 2021, 89). Burial of local Singaporeans at these military cemeteries was not usually the case. Nine members of a platoon of the Second Battalion of the Singapore Infantry Regiment were killed in an ambush at Kota Tinggi on 28 February 1965 by Indonesian infiltrators into Johor. The war dead whose families were in Singapore were buried at the civilian Bidadari Cemetery with full military honors, while the others with Malaysian families were buried by their relatives in Malaysia (*Straits Times* 6 March 1965).

### **The Contested Cold War Deathscapes of Singapore in the 1970s**

There were implications of the Pasir Panjang and Ulu Pandan military cemeteries having almost all their war dead from the Commonwealth forces with few Singaporeans buried in them. The cemeteries and their

graves, with their stories of heroic sacrifice for the British Empire, such as that of Hambrook, were remote from most Singaporeans, who were largely not involved in the imperial burial ceremonies of the Cold War dead. This had consequences for the future of these deathscapes in a postcolonial independent Singapore. Singapore's independence in 1965 and the gradual withdrawal of Commonwealth troops from the late 1960s into the early 1970s provided a different context for commemoration of the war dead from the times when the military bases had a significant impact on the cityscape and its memoryscapes to the war dead.

In the 1970s, with the winding up of British military bases in Singapore, the Pasir Panjang and Ulu Pandan military cemeteries with their foreign war dead from other parts of the Commonwealth appeared to many Singaporeans as deathscapes of a bygone colonial era. Commemorative activities at these sites were seen in a similar way. In 1969, in Malaysia and Singapore, the selling of red paper poppies on Remembrance Sunday to commemorate the Commonwealth war dead and to raise funds for the veterans ceased for a decade as it was perceived in these postcolonial countries as "an obsolete British institution" (*Straits Times* 12 November 1979). After the Commonwealth troops left Singapore, attendance at commemorative services such as Remembrance Sunday fell from thousands to less than a few hundred. By 1982, only a hundred attended the Remembrance Sunday ceremony at Kranji (*Straits Times* 15 November 1982). Senior Singapore journalist T. F. Hwang described the common perception: "Several of my younger friends here seemed to think that the whole Remembrance Day affair amounted to nothing more than purely an all-British event or, at the least British-oriented" (*Straits Times*, 16 November 1985). Some questioned whether the commemorative ceremonies would die as the few local Singaporean veterans who attended passed away. T. K. Chia of Singapore's Ex-Services Association noted: "There is definitely a down trend. Fewer and fewer people are coming to the memorial unless there is exposure in the press" (*New Paper* 10 November 1988).

The ruling PAP also did not have any sense of attachment to these memoryscapes of the war dead from the military forces of the British Empire. The perspectives held by its members had been shaped by their own experiences of the Cold War in Singapore. These experiences were different from those of the Commonwealth forces who had been engaged in a war against an armed insurrection. For members of the PAP, the Cold War had meant not fighting the communists in military engagements but opposing the communist attempts to take control in Singapore through a communist united front strategy. The moderate PAP members had to deal

with extensive communist infiltration of their own party, which had led to the pro-communists splitting the party in 1961. Setting up their own party, the Barisan Sosialis, the pro-communists then sought to defeat the PAP in elections in 1963. After losing the 1963 elections, the pro-communists resigned from parliament, switched to street demonstrations, and did not contest the 1968 elections—an act from which they did not politically recover because they never were able to win any seats in parliament afterwards. The PAP dealt with its communist political opponents by using arrest and detention without trial under its Internal Security Act. Determining who was a communist and a threat to security and who was just a left-wing political opponent who was no threat to security proved a divisive issue in Singapore, as the PAP went about crushing and then eliminating what it saw as communist threats.

Crushing their pro-communist political opponents helped the PAP establish a strong one-party state focused on economic development and raising living standards, or what has been called a developmental state. Singapore was like other developmental states in Asia of the 1970s and 1980s, such as South Korea and Taiwan, which derived legitimacy not from democracy but from being able to deliver economic development, high rates of economic growth, and sustained rising living standards (Castells 1998, 3). Not having to pay attention to politics meant that the state was able to put together and execute an effective economic development plan that did not cater for special interests but was more national in its scope (Castells 1992, 56). The goal of the Singapore developmental state was one of rapid industrialization by attracting multinational corporations to set up export-oriented manufacturing in Singapore. This was much more achievable after having defeated the pro-communist political opponents. The Singapore state marshalled all of its resources for this paramount purpose (Huff 1995). In resource-poor Singapore, this meant utilizing what scarce land it had available for factories and industrial areas (Perry, et al. 1997). The developmental state sought to augment its human capital as other Asian developmental states were doing in the 1970s (Gopinathan 2013, 40). Industrialization under the developmental state also meant that Singapore's people, as perhaps its only natural resource, needed to be housed well so they could develop and contribute to Singapore's industrialization and rising living standards.

Making the most of the land as a resource for economic development under the Singapore developmental state often meant exhuming the many cemeteries in Singapore (Yeoh and Tan 1995). Lim Kim San, a PAP cabinet minister and the first chairman of the Housing Development Board, often had to justify these actions to delegations of old people protesting the

acquisition of cemeteries with their ancestors buried in them (Huang 2014, 37). Lim was well-known for asking them: “Do you want me to look after your dead grandparents or do you want me to look after your grandchildren?” (*Straits Times* 28 October 2011). The exhumation of many Chinese cemeteries in Singapore was evidence of the PAP government’s adherence to Lim’s standard reply to complaints about exhuming cemeteries for redevelopment (Tan and Yeoh 2013). Thus, the exhumations were of many cemeteries according to the dictates of urban planning.

As British forces left Singapore, they handed over their military bases and state land to the Singapore government. The Cold War cemeteries of Pasir Panjang and Ulu Pandan were given up along with other state land belonging to the military complexes near to them on the assumption that the Singapore government would continue to lease the cemeteries to the British military. Confidential documents later declassified reveal that the PAP government announced in private meetings with the British High Commission and military forces during 1971 that the Pasir Panjang Military Cemetery would be redeveloped into a recreational area for planned housing projects. Upon learning of this, the services departments of the ministry of defense in London were privately outraged although they did not express this to the Singapore government.<sup>10</sup> Realizing that the Singapore government was exhuming many of its own Chinese cemeteries seemed to persuade the British officials involved to not contest the decision by the Singapore government. W. J. Watts, the British High Commissioner, wrote to his superiors at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London:

I do not think that there is the slightest chance of getting the Singapore government to change their mind over this and to issue us with a long lease. They are at the moment braving storms of protest and risking the votes of Chinese traditionalists by insisting on the removal of a large Chinese cemetery in order to expand Singapore port facilities. The Prime Minister has stated that because of the shortage of land in this small island the use of land for burials must be curtailed and in a few years’ time all deceased Singaporeans will have to be cremated.<sup>11</sup>

10 See the correspondence among the British officials, in particular Pasir Panjang Military Cemetery, G. E. Goddard, Ministry of Defence, to B. R. T. Langridge, South West Pacific Department 9 March 1972, in Disposal of M. O. D. Real Estate in Singapore, FCO 24/1291 (The National Archives, United Kingdom).

11 Pasir Panjang Military Cemetery, W. J. Watts, British High Commissioner to S. W. F. Martin, South West Department Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 17 January 1972, in Disposal of M. O. D. Real Estate in Singapore, FCO 24/1291 (The National Archives, United Kingdom).

The British High Commissioner suggested that the graves be moved to Kranji. This was later approved by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, which managed Kranji. In April 1972, after a visit to Singapore, the representative of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission in a report reiterated the High Commissioner's assessment of the ruling PAP government's commitment to exhuming cemeteries for development:

Some Chinese cemeteries in Singapore have already been moved and it is reported that the one in Pasir Panjang will soon be moved—this, in the British HC's view, tips the balance in favour of not resisting the pressure to move the military cemetery, the more particularly because the Chinese do not like the disturbance of remains and the Chinese Cemetery in Pasir Panjang is actually of the Haka [sic] Sect, which is that of Prime Minister Lee.<sup>12</sup>

During the transfer of the graves of the Pasir Panjang Military Cemetery to Kranji, which was completed in 1974, the removal of the Ulu Pandan Military Cemetery was informally raised with the British High Commission by Singapore authorities in July 1973.<sup>13</sup> By 1975, the British military authorities, although unhappy, realized that the Singapore government would continue to raise the issue, so started to plan for a transfer of the graves to Kranji. On 7 April 1975, the Singapore government confirmed the land would be redeveloped and that the British military forces should arrange for the reburials of the remains.<sup>14</sup> The transfer to Kranji of graves from the Ulu Pandan Military Cemetery took place during 1976 and 1977.

Exhuming the graves of the Pasir Panjang and Ulu Pandan military cemeteries and transferring them to Kranji to be next to the war dead of WWII brought about a greater awareness of how these cemeteries were similar but fundamentally different from what was known as the Kranji War Cemetery. The transfer of graves from both Pasir Panjang and Ulu Pandan military cemeteries entailed removing remains that had been previously moved

12 Commonwealth War Graves Commission DFE's Visit to Eastern and Pacific Regions (Delhi, Singapore, Melbourne) April 1972–Singapore, 11 April 1972, in Disposal of M. O. D. Real Estate in Singapore, FCO 24/1291 (The National Archives, United Kingdom).

13 Commander, Twenty-Eight Infantry Brigade to Major General J. H. Page, 14 March 1975, Ulu Pandan Military Cemetery, in Kranji (ex Ulu Pandan) Military Cemetery, DEFE 24/761 (The National Archives, United Kingdom).

14 British Cemeteries in Singapore, Commission of Lands, Singapore to Helen Taylor, British High Commission, 7 April 1975, in Kranji (ex Ulu Pandan) Military Cemetery, DEFE 24/761 (The National Archives, United Kingdom).

to these cemeteries from other locations, such as the Bidadari Cemetery, which was established in the first decade of the twentieth century. Among the buried in the military cemeteries were the wives and children of service personnel who had died when, for example, their father or husband was on service in Singapore; buried with the Gurkhas were many stillborn babies. There were also graves of service personnel who did not die in combat. Not surprisingly, these graves from the Pasir Panjang and Ulu Pandan military cemeteries came to constitute a separate cemetery adjacent to the Kranji War Cemetery grounds, which was called the Kranji Military Cemetery. It was regarded as a military cemetery of service personnel who died in peace time as opposed to the Kranji War Cemetery, which was dedicated to the war dead of WWII. The Kranji Military Cemetery was not regarded as a being a war cemetery, although many buried there had died fighting during the Cold War in Southeast Asia.<sup>15</sup>

### The Politics of the Cold War Dead

Commemoration at Kranji with its focus on the Kranji War Cemetery's war dead from WWII has left the adjacent Kranji Military Cemetery with its war dead from the Cold War marginalized. Remembrance Sunday ceremonies after the creation of the Kranji Military Cemetery continued to be among the tombstones and memorials to the war dead of WWII with most attending oblivious to the presence of war dead from the Cold War nearby on the Southern slope of the Kranji War Cemetery. In 1982, the Remembrance Sunday ceremony at Kranji was said at the time to be held as a "memorial service organized by the Ex-Services Association of Singapore to honour and remember all Singaporeans and allies from overseas who died in World War II" (*Straits Times* 15 November 1982). Not a word was said about the Cold War dead in the adjacent Kranji Military Cemetery. In 1983, when representatives from the Singapore Armed Forces first started to attend Remembrance Sunday ceremonies, there was also surprisingly no mention of the war dead of the Cold War, and only focus on the war dead of WWII (*Straits Times* 12 November 1983). Scholars, such as Hamzah Muzaini and Brenda S. A. Yeoh (2007), have concluded that this focus on commemorating the military war dead of the British Empire from WWII at Kranji has tended to give the impression to many local Singaporeans that

<sup>15</sup> S/DS 14/112/19 Ulu Pandan Military Cemetery Singapore, Requirement for Evacuation, in Kranji (ex Ulu Pandan) Military Cemetery, DEFE 24/761 (The National Archives, United Kingdom).

the ceremony reflects the colonialism of a bygone era rather than connects with the local population.

For the ruling PAP, when its members remembered the Cold War in Singapore they did not think of the war dead from the Malayan Emergency, but the events that they had experienced fighting the communist united front movement within Singapore. By the 1990s and 2000s many of the detainees that the PAP had jailed without trial under the Internal Security Act had been released and were old and writing about their experiences, providing counternarratives to the PAP's story of how the PAP vanquished the communist movement in Singapore and created the Singapore developmental state which had brought stability and prosperity. These former detainees saw themselves as having belonged to a progressive leftist movement which had been wrongfully suppressed and its members arrested and detained under the pretext that they were a threat to security. By the time of the fiftieth anniversaries of the political events of the 1950s and 1960s these former political opponents had produced a considerable body of writing (Poh et al. 2013; Ramakrishna 2015).

Challenged by these counternarratives that were being published in the form of memoirs and discussed at book launches, the PAP sought to enshrine its own account of the Cold War and the threat of the communists. This was done by the unveiling of a memorial in the civic district to those who had opposed the communists in Singapore during the Cold War, entitled "Forging a Nation: Singaporeans' Struggle Against the Violence and Subversion of the Communist Party of Malaya (1948–89)." This monument proclaimed in large letters: "Dedicated to all those who Braved Violence and Intimidation to Fight for a Democratic and Non-Communist Singapore." The unveiling of the monument occurred on 8 December 2014. S. R. Nathan, the President of Singapore, unveiled the monument in the presence of senior government figures, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs Teo Chee Hean, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Lawrence Wong, and Second Minister for Home Affairs Masagos Zulkifli. In attendance at the ceremony were also former Singaporean police officers who had been involved in operations against the communists (*Straits Times* 8 December 2014). The PAP government wanted to memorialize its own fight against the communist united front during the Cold War by erecting a monument in the civic district of Singapore. Yet, in contrast, the Cold War memoryscape at the Kranji Military Cemetery, which was perceived to be very much tied to the colonial era, in postcolonial Singapore was outside of the PAP's focus for remembering the Cold War.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the memoryscapes established for the war dead of the Cold War in Singapore during the 1940s to the 1960s were once prominent focuses of commemoration by the Commonwealth forces. But this occurred only during the Cold War when thousands of troops were stationed at bases across the Singapore cityscape. Their prominence in the cityscape faded with the end of the empire, the departure of the Commonwealth forces, and the emergence of a postcolonial Singapore. There were multiple reasons for the fading of their prominence in the Singapore cityscape. The deathscapes were monuments to the Commonwealth forces rather than local Singaporeans. Also, while in Malaysia there was an armed insurrection that the Commonwealth forces waged a war against, in Singapore the struggle was seen as one that was against a communist-inspired united front that aimed to attain power by conspiring to manipulate and subvert the political process. A strong PAP developmental state arose out of this Cold War political conflict and was seen as central to Singapore's success, especially in preferencing the utilization of land for economic development over most other uses, particularly the use of land for cemeteries. Thus, Singapore's PAP emerged from its political struggle with the communists having a perspective different from its British counterparts who placed considerable value on the cemeteries of their former imperial war dead. These differing perspectives meant that Cold War memoryscapes became contested spaces in postcolonial Singapore.

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# 11. Reading Multiculturalism on Screen: Cold War Politics and the Shaw Brothers Film Networks in Singapore and Malaya

*Soo Ei Yap*

**Abstract:** Multiculturalism was advocated as an anticolonial rhetoric by the newly-formed political party People's Action Party (PAP) in 1954. Since then, it has remained a consistent state ideology in Singapore's society, but little is known about how the concept was envisaged by individuals in the immediate post-WWII era. This essay looks at four different movies produced in the era and argues that a collective identity of multiculturalism in Singapore cannot be solely attributed to the sheer political will of its founding leaders after the nation became independent in 1965. Rather, it was built upon the moviescape of the various film companies and, over time, shaped the memoryscape of multiculturalism across disparate cities and communities in Southeast Asia.

**Keywords:** Multiculturalism, identity, Cold War politics, Shaw Organization, Cathay Organization, Kong Ngee Film Company

## Introduction

Multiculturalism was advocated as an anticolonial rhetoric by the newly-formed political party People's Action Party (PAP) in 1954. Since then, it has remained a consistent state ideology in Singapore's society. While scholars like Chua (2003) and Goh (2008) have studied how multiculturalism in Singapore was implemented through public policies, little has been said on how the concept was envisaged by individuals in the immediate post-WWII Singapore. During the golden age of Chinese and Malay filmmaking in

Singapore, movies had proven to exert a popular influence over the local population in the 1950s and 1960s. If political leaders like Lee Kuan Yew had consciously advocated the need to build a harmonious multiracial society to allay the fear that a Chinese-majority Singapore could potentially become a Third China in Asia (Lee 1966), what were the factors that compelled commercial film companies to actively portray multiculturalism in their movies? What did the representations of multiculturalism, disseminated through the works of the Shaw Organization, Cathay Organization, and Kong Ngee Film Company, tell us about Singapore and Hong Kong during the Cold War, especially when Hong Kong provided not only the capital and talents for Chinese filmmaking but also a crucial film market for these films? How did the Cold War lend impetus to various concepts of multiculturalism after WWII?

To address the questions above, the first part of this essay will focus on the extensive film distribution networks of the three major players (mentioned above) which effectively linked up Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Singapore since the 1920s and 1930s. By understanding how these film companies developed, competed, and made their foray into movie production after WWII, we see a connection between the places or cities in Southeast Asia where their films are distributed. We also see the rationale to focus on producing films in certain languages (Cantonese, Mandarin, or Malay) as well as specific themes such as multi-culturalism. The second part of this essay will focus on how the cityscape forms the backdrop of three films—*Nyonya and Baba* (1956), *Blood Valley* (1957), and *Sri Menanti* (1957). Apart from depicting multiculturalism on screen, the juxtaposition or lack of cityscape contributed towards the memoryscape of a new-found national identity as the local population eagerly consumed these various movies in their pastime. The last part of this essay will turn to *My Love in Malaya* (1963), where the use of multiculturalism was the last of its kind depicted on the silver screen. Subsequently, the film industry in Singapore enters a hiatus in film production between 1970s and 1990s, and it was more common for the local population to turn to television or theatre for their appreciation of multiculturalism in Singapore (Millet 2006).

With these three parts, this essay argues that a collective identity of multiculturalism in Singapore cannot be solely attributed to the sheer political will of its founding leaders after the nation became independent in 1965. Rather, what was overlooked was how the moviescape of the Shaw Brothers' network of film distribution allowed audiences to visualize and appreciate multiculturalism on almost a day-to-day basis. For individuals growing up in the era, such visual encounters, coupled with a unique set of

discursive conditions in pre-independence Singapore, as well as Cold War politics in Asia, helped to lend credence to the ideas of multiculturalism.

### The Three Major Players in the Film Industry of Singapore and Malaya

The Shaw Organization can trace its roots to 1924 in Shanghai. Back then it was known as Tianyi (Unique Film Productions, hereon Unique) with Runje Shaw at the helm. He was assisted by his three younger brothers—Runde Shaw, Runme Shaw, and Run Run Shaw, each of whom was responsible for a special aspect of the business in China. Unique was a family enterprise. Within six months of its opening, Runje Shaw had already directed three films, quickly making a name for the studio. However, his opportunistic business practices incurred the ire of his competitors, and in 1926 film companies namely Mingxing, Dazhonghua-Baihe (Great China–Lily), Min Xin (China Sun), Youlian, Shanghai, and Huaju merged to form the Liuhe (United Six) Film Company to challenge Unique (Zhang 2004). They requested that film distributors who wanted to screen movies made by the six studios could not show anything from Unique, effectively forcing the four Shaw brothers to explore new business opportunities abroad.

Armed with film prints and portable projectors, Runme Shaw quickly found a lucrative market in Southeast Asia and he was able to tap into the convenience of roads and railway which connected Singapore, Johor, Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur, Penang and other western parts of Malaya, constructed by the British since the late-nineteenth century. His youngest brother Run Run Shaw soon joined him in Singapore and together they set up the Hai Seng Film Company in August 1927 and rented the Empire Theatre from Straits-born Chinese merchant Kung Tian Siong (1876–1958) to screen silent movies made by Unique. Soon, a decision was made by the Shaw brothers to switch to producing sound films and they made *Gechang chunse* (Romance of the opera) which was screened in Singapore in 1931. The film garnered a rather positive response, followed by the next talkie *Baijin long* (White platinum dragon) which was often described as one of the top-grossing films in Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Macau, and Southeast Asia when it was first screened in 1933 (Wong 2003; Yeh 2018). The huge demand for Cantonese films in this region eventually became an opportunity for the Shaw brothers to set up the Nanyang Film Company in Hong Kong in order to focus on Cantonese film production before the fall of Singapore in 1942 (Chung 2007). After WWII, Cantonese films continued to account for the highest quantity

among Chinese films which were imported into Singapore and Malaya, followed by Mandarin and Amoy films (Yi 1959). To keep up with the demand for entertainment after the war, the Shaw brothers also inaugurated the Malay Film Productions (MFP) Limited in 1949 as their official production arm in Singapore. They were able to reap success with Malay films such as *Singapura Di-Waktu Malam* (Singapore night) in 1947 and *Nasib* (Fate) in 1949, both directed by Indian film director B. S. Rajhans. In just twenty years between 1947 and 1967, more than 160 Malay films were produced in total ("About Shaw: Malay Film Productions"). The period from the 1960s to early 1970s was the heyday of the Shaw Organization in Hong Kong, which produced forty Chinese film titles every year ("About Shaw: Shaw Organisation, 1970").

The second major player in the film industry of Singapore and Malaya was Loke Wan Tho (1915–64) who formed the Associated Theatres in 1935. He was assisted by Max Baker, manager of the United Artists Corporation in Singapore and, later, John Ede, his classmate from Cambridge University (Wong 2002). They initially chose to screen predominantly Western films in Singapore and Malaya but when the war ended in 1945, Loke Wan Tho recruited several prominent film directors and scriptwriters like Doe Ching, Yueh Feng, Wong Tin Lam, Evan Yang and Eileen Chang to kickstart the production of a series of high-quality Mandarin films in Hong Kong. These films could then be supplied to his own chain of theatres including the Pavilion Theatre in Kuala Lumpur as well as the Cathay in Singapore. By 1949, Loke acquired and operated more than forty theatres in Singapore and his chain of cinemas could also be found in Penang, Borneo, and Thailand. Subsequently, he also collaborated with Ho Ah Loke (1901–82) in 1953 to embark on Malay film production through the Cathay-Keris which soon became a strong rival of Shaw's MFP. Unlike the four Shaw brothers, neither Loke or Ho were born in China but in Kuala Lumpur and British Guiana respectively. It was thus not a surprise to see that Loke chose to venture into the making of Malay and Mandarin films in the 1950s, with several of them winning international film awards and critical recognition prior to his untimely death in a plane crash on 20 June 1964.

The third major player were the Ho brothers, namely Ho Khee-yong (1901–66) and Ho Khee-siang (1904–79), who both hailed from Dabu, Guangdong. They arrived in Singapore at a young age with their parents in 1911 and inherited their father's pawnbroking and diamond business. The growing popularity of Chinese movies in the 1930s saw the Ho brothers setting up the Yuan Dong Film Company to import and screen films at the Jubilee Theatre as well as the Kong Ngee Film Company which was initially listed as a joint

venture with Hakka businessman Chong Moong Seng and his son-in-law Zhang Meng Xian as partners (Registry of Business *Kong Ngee Film Co* [1947-1971]). When the war ended in 1945, the Ho brothers began to construct a series of new theatres in Singapore, Johor, Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, and Penang which were mostly mining towns with a predominantly Chinese community, specializing in the exhibition and distribution of Mandarin and Cantonese films. Only in 1953 did the Ho brothers decide to invest in production of Cantonese films using the Wader Film Studio in Hong Kong to diversify its business. They were also approached by veteran film directors Chun Kim (1926–69) and Chan Man (1924–2012) who helped to train younger directors like Chor Yuen (1933–2022), and Lung Kong (1934–2014), and recruited newbies such as Patrick Tse Yin, Patsy Kar Ling, Nam Hung, Chow Chung, and Kong Suet for the company. Four subsidiaries were eventually set up in Hong Kong to produce more Chinese films for their chain of theatres, for which Chiu Ngee focused on Teochew films while Yuet Ngee focused on martial arts films. Kong Ngee and Sun Ngee focused on melodrama and urban romance films while Hing Ngee focused on teen flicks. All in all, 154 films were produced prior to the closure of Kong Ngee in 1968 with another twenty more films produced by these four subsidiaries during the 1960s (Wong 2006).

One commonality among the three film companies was a shift in strategy from focusing on exhibition to production and distribution after WWII. In an interview conducted by the Hong Kong Film Archive in 2005, Ho Kheeyong's third son Ho Kian-ngiap recalls that his father would take a flight and acquire mostly Mandarin films from Shanghai for screening in Singapore (Ibid). This strategy was disrupted after the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 and they switched to buying Cantonese films from Hong Kong to screen in their chain of theatres.<sup>1</sup> A challenge soon emerged in the 1950s as Cathay Organization had quickly established a regular working relationship to screen and distribute Cantonese films produced by the Union Film Enterprise while the two Shaw brothers were purchasing the rights to Cantonese films produced by famous actors/actresses such as Ng Cho-fan, Pak Yin, and Cheung Wood-yau. This caused Kong Ngee to be at the losing

1 Apart from managing the Majestic (大华) Theatre in Ipoh and Penang, Kong Ngee also operated the Metropole (金华) Theatre in Johor and Kuala Lumpur. In Singapore, they had three theatres—Marlborough (曼舞罗), Metropole, and Venus (金都), while a fourth one, Golden City (金城), was officially opened in 1965 in Queenstown (reported to accommodate more than 100,000 residents in Singapore). See "The Opening of Venus Theatre." *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 18. 29 September 1965, and "The Golden City officially opens in Queenstown." *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, 8. 29 October 1965.

end and forced them to produce their own supply of Cantonese films at the Wader Film Studio, with a focus on youths and romance, set in urban and contemporary settings in Hong Kong. Ho Kian-ngap was also quick to spot other opportunities in Southeast Asia after WWII. For example, Chiu Ngee was meant to focus on Teochew films in the early 1960s for export. While these Teochew films were shot entirely in Hong Kong, they were hardly screened there but exported to Singapore, Malaya, and Thailand where the demand was high among the sizeable population of overseas Chinese.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, if we turn to the case of Loke Wan Tho, his decision to purchase theatres from Ong Keng Huat in Penang as part of his business expansion as well as his collaboration with Ho Ah Loke to embark on the strategy of Malay film productions in the 1950s were carefully deliberated. Their decision was based on an intimate knowledge of the anglicized Chinese population, and this gave them confidence to explore the possibility of making Malay films after the WWII, having been able to observe firsthand the taste and preference of the anglicized Chinese community of which they were a part. Take, for example, George Town, the capital city of Penang, which was initially a settlement with a mixed population. The Indians made up the majority in the early-nineteenth century, and there was a sizeable Malay community comprising migrants and settlers from other parts of the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra and Southern Thailand living in the area. The Malays were mostly engaged in agriculture and lived in the east of the island, just across the Penang Channel in Province Wellesley (known as Seberang Perai today). However, the discovery and opening of tin mines in Perak in the 1840s soon led to an exponential increase in Chinese population, and by the 1890s there was another influx of Chinese migrants from China who were eager to take up commercial agriculture in the various tobacco and rubber plantations (Seng et al. 2009). This ultimately changed the demographics, but it was the community of anglicized Straits-born Chinese who continued to command a strong economic presence in Penang at the turn of the twentieth century (Khor 2006).

This distinctive group of anglicized Straits-born Chinese also known as the Peranakans, were relatively well-to-do and spoke only English and Baba Malay, having receiving a Western education in Singapore or in the other Straits Settlements (Turnbull 2001). The women are known as *nyonyas* and

2 Only a small quantity of Teochew films would be screened in venues like the Ko Shing Theatre (高升) and the Pei Ho Theatre (北河) in Hong Kong. These Teochew films had to face stiff competition from Mandarin, Japanese, and Western films in the same era (Huang 2015). On the popularity of Teochew films in Southeast Asia, see Wu (2013).

men are known as *babas*. They also became British subjects at the end of the nineteenth century, thus enjoying rights to education, and economic and political involvement that excluded most China-born migrants. According to the observation made by Freedman (1965), the Straits-born Chinese were considered the most privileged class in Singapore and Malaya, constituting the target audience for Cathay-Keris when Loke and Ho first explored the possibility of making Malay films in the 1950s. To woo the crowd, their early works, such as the 1953 *Buloh Perindu* (Magic flute), were shot in color. They also went on to produce the hugely popular horror film about an attractive female vampire called *Pontianak* in 1957 (based on Malay folklores). It premiered at the Cathay which was their flagship theatre located at Dhoby Ghaut, coinciding with the Malay festival of Hari Raya Puasa and resulted in long queues forming at the cinema. It was then distributed to other theatres and exhibited for almost two months, an unusual occurrence for the Malay film industry in the era. Subsequently, the film was dubbed into Cantonese for viewing in Hong Kong and into English for telecast on American television.

Finally, the Shaw Organization had the fastest rate of business expansion after the WWII. As published in an advertisement featured in the local newspaper *Sin Chew Jit Poh* in January 1941, Shaw operated as many as sixty-nine theatres in Singapore and Malaya. In Singapore alone, Shaw listed eight theatres under its charge, the highest concentration in one city as compared to six in Penang and Ipoh, four in Kuala Lumpur, three in Malacca and Seremban and two in Taiping, Batu Pahat and Sungei Patani. By 1958, it was reported that they operated more than 100 theatres in Singapore, Malaya, North Borneo, Vietnam, Thailand, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. In Singapore alone, the city boosted a 100 percent increase to sixteen cinemas under the charge of the Shaw Organization (Chen 2003, 46–75). They also established working relationships with another 200 to 300 smaller theatres as well as secured ownership of ten amusement parks and four cabarets in the region (Fu 2008). An article in *Screen Voice* published in March 1947 also acknowledged that the profit returns from the British-ruled Singapore-Malaya and Thailand, Dutch-ruled Indonesia, and French-ruled Vietnam, were enough to cover 50 percent of the total production costs for the company.

By the end of 1940s, the largest city in every Southeast Asian country (except Burma) would have achieved the “million status” constituting a formidable and rapidly-expanding film market (Huff and Huff 2015, 527–30). The statistics thus allowed the Shaw Organization to make a bold switch to focus on catering to the audiences outside the PRC. In fact, statistics revealed that the population of Singapore was close to 1.45 million in 1957.

About 75 percent of the overall population were Chinese and between 12–14.5 percent were Malays. In the same year, 37 percent (or 2.3 million) of the overall population in Malaysia were Chinese and close to 50 percent (or 3.1 million) were Malays (Saw 2012). The combined figures of the Chinese and Malay populations in Singapore and Malaysia would be more than twice the total population of Hong Kong, which stood at 2.7 million in 1957 but less than the total population of nine million in Taiwan. Based on Taiwan's official census in 1955, the population was predominantly Chinese (Accounting Office, National Development Council, "Taiwan Statistical Data Book 2019", 27). This demographic also explains why the total output of Cantonese films from 1955 to 1964 began to show a gradual decline.<sup>3</sup>

In the early 1940s, the Shaw Organization adopted the strategy of inviting Chinese or Indian film directors to produce Malay films in Singapore that could be screened either locally (including Malaya) or exported to parts of Indonesia.<sup>4</sup> Following the inauguration of the MFP Limited in 1949, more than 160 Malay films were produced by the company between 1947 and 1967 ("About Shaw: Malay Film Productions"). Notably, Shaw's extensive distribution network helped to encourage local production and groom talents like P. Ramlee and Chang Lye Lye by facilitating the model of interracial collaboration in filmmaking. This collaboration was fruitful to a certain extent and Shaw's Malay films were so popular in the 1950s that a quota system was later implemented to protect the nascent Indonesian film industry by their government. It stipulated that for every screening of a film made in Singapore, three Indonesian films had to be shown in the Malay Peninsula (Van der Heide 2002, 144).

More recently, some scholars have uncovered how the film industry in Southeast Asia functioned as a critical venue to propagate the United States' foreign policy interests during the Cold War. The US was able to do so on two fronts: first, by building an alliance of anticommunist film producers through The Asia Foundation, and second by organizing film festivals like

3 The number of Mandarin films produced and released by Shaw is generally more than double that of the Cantonese films except in 1960 which saw the highest record of seventeen Cantonese films produced in the same year, mirroring the number of Mandarin films. For the years 1956 and 1964, zero Cantonese films were produced and released while eleven and fifteen Mandarin films were released. For the detailed listing, see Fu (2008, 61). In the early 1960s, the Shaw Organization managed to enter the Taiwan film market, and they began to place a higher priority on producing more Mandarin films instead of Cantonese, Teochew, or Amoy films which catered to the preference of the overseas Chinese communities living in urban cities such as Bangkok and Manila.

4 Hou Yao and Wan Hoi Ling produced about seven Malay films for the Shaw brothers before the fall of Singapore in 1942. These include *Mutiara* (Pearl), *Bermadu* (Polygamy), *Ibu Tiri* (Stepmother), *Terang Bulan di Malaya* (Full moon over Malaya) and others.

the Southeast Asia Film Festival (later renamed as the Asian Film Festival in 1957) to promote camaraderie among filmmakers.<sup>5</sup> With his shrewdness, Run Run Shaw was elected as the vice president of the Federation of Motion Picture producers in Asia (FMPPA) set up by The Asia Foundation in 1954. Yet, he chose to devote resources to produce Malay and Mandarin blockbusters revolving around spectacular musicals, and historical or period films during the period, and he was cautious not to infuse overt anticommunist sentiments in his works. At the same time, he was aware that audience tastes were fickle and that he would need to constantly source for themes that could respond to the varied demands from diverse communities of audiences. In doing so, the Shaw Organization hoped to continue dominating the regional film market and to provide an alternative memoryscape for the population to consume in Singapore, Malaya, and beyond. One of such themes was on multiculturalism, which seemed to offer an easy solution to the psychological needs of the overseas Chinese in their transition to a new national identity in the 1950s and 1960s in Southeast Asia (Barr, M. D., and Z. Skrbis 2008; Chong 2018).

### **Multi-Culturalism and Mapping the Memoryscape in Pre- and Postwar Singapore**

WWII ended in 1945 with the dropping of atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Britain's victory, however, meant that it had to hasten its plan to grant independence to its colonies. As the Cold War ensued shortly in Asia, the British began to reconsider keeping Singapore as their crown colony indefinitely for purpose of defense and intelligence (Abshire 2011). It was against this backdrop that the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) launched a series of strikes and rallies which soon led to violent conflicts and a state of emergency was declared in Singapore on 24 June 1948. It was only lifted in 1960 with political leaders attributing the rise of domestic violence to instigations by the MCP and under the indirect influence of Chinese Communist leaders in the PRC (Lee 2008).

At the height of the Cold War in Asia, Lee Kuan Yew, the founding prime minister of Singapore, frequently professed the view that “[the] destiny of the peoples of South-East Asia [is] a common one” in which ethnic differences must be put aside in order to push for decolonization in this region, work

5 The Asia Foundation is a private nonprofit organization set up in 1951 which had close ties with the Central Intelligence Agency. See Lee (2017, 108–37).

towards mutual benefits and stability in the society after the end of British rule in Singapore (Lee 1960). Not surprisingly, if we were to look at the numerous speeches given during the 1950s and 1960s, Lee Kuan Yew made several obvious references to his political agenda as that of anticolonialism and forging a multicultural identity which was necessary for the citizens-to-be in Singapore. In one of his speeches, he expressed disdain for the colonial government who were known to adopt the divide and rule strategy. Instead, he urged the different ethnic groups in Singapore to stay united so that they could pit themselves against the “small group of Europeans” and fight for independence.<sup>6</sup>

Another well-documented incident which took place earlier in 1950 also demonstrate this trope of racial differentiation among political leaders in Singapore. Known as the Maria Hertogh riots which took place in Singapore between 11 and 13 December 1950, this became a textbook example in the school curriculum of post-independent Singapore which emphasized the lack of sensitivity among the colonial administrators.<sup>7</sup> The Maria Hertogh riots ultimately resulted in eighteen deaths and 173 injured and diminished the imperial legitimacy of British rule (Hussin 2005, 561–75). Political leaders were also quick to notice how religion and racial issues could be utilized as potential ideological tools to stir up the population in Singapore and could potentially intertwine with Cold War politics as seen in the example below.

In July 1964, a series of violent clashes erupted between the Malay and Chinese communities in Singapore. This happened one year after Singapore's independence through a merger into the Federation of Malaysia. The first

6 See Lee Kuan Yew's victory rally speech given at the Padang on 3 June 1959 where he said “We held no private celebrations to rejoice in victory. Instead, we come tonight to rejoice with you. We the people of Singapore have decided to run Singapore affair. We have come to celebrate here on this Padang, and we use the steps of this building as our stage. Do you know, we wanted to use this Padang for our election rallies at night? But a small group of Europeans who were given this field by the former Colonial Government, refused it, although they only use it in the day time for a few people to play games. Well times have changed, and will stay changed.” Retrieved from the National Archives of Singapore.

7 The riot started when the court declared that the *nikah gantung* (marriage) between Maria Hertogh and her Malay husband Mansoor Adabi was invalid. The court also gave custody of Maria to the Dutch consulate “with the liberty to restore her to her parents in Holland,” when Maria's mother had willingly given the six-year-old child away to a Malay family friend, Che Aminah binte Mohamed, to look after during the Japanese occupation. After the end of the war, Maria moved to Terengganu with her foster family where she was brought up in the Muslim faith and renamed Nadra binte Ma'arof. While waiting to depart for the Netherlands to reunite with her birth parents, Maria stayed temporarily at the Roman Catholic Convent of the Good Shepherd, and this arrangement further offended the Malay community who were already unhappy with the court's decision. For more details on the background and significance of the Maria Hertogh incident, see (Aljunied) 2009, 21.

part of this series of racial riots started on 21 July 1964, when an estimated 20,000 Malays participated in a procession to celebrate the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. It was suspected that a Chinese individual threw a bottle at the procession, an act that provoked some Malays. It soon escalated into a riot and caused damage to many public and private properties around different parts of Singapore (Lau 2003). The second series of riots broke out in September the same year, after a Malay trishaw rider was killed in Geylang Serai. It resulted in thirteen deaths and 106 persons injured.

A commission of inquiry was called for to investigate the causes of both riots with rumors like the PAP government's poor treatment of Malays in Singapore being attributed to one of the causes of the riots. Eventually, political leaders agreed that these acts of violence were a part of Indonesia's Konfrontasi policy aimed at weakening Malaysia. Not long after, Singapore separated and became independent in August 1965. Since 1997, the date of the riot (21 July) has been marked out as Racial Harmony Day and commemorated in schools annually through lectures and workshops that emphasize to students that "race and religion will always be potential fault lines in Singapore's society" (Nexus, SG101 "Building a Multicultural Singapore").

The examples provided above illustrate the sociopolitical background in which multiculturalism became the cornerstone of Singapore's national policy and shaped the collective identity of Singapore citizens after its independence. Since then, the emphasis on equality of all races has been reinforced through education, housing policies, and national service, even in radio and television programs launched in the 1960s and 1970s. Malay remains the national language of Singapore, and the national anthem has been sung in Malay, while English, Chinese, Malay, and Tamil are designated as the four official languages in Singapore. All students are expected to learn at least two different languages in school. Even in Nanyang University—the first Chinese university to be established outside China in 1958—the school took efforts to recruit students from other language streams, promote the learning of Malay, and explore the formation of a Malay Studies Department to serve as an important cultural bridge between the Chinese and the Malay in Singapore before its closure in 1980.

### **Competing Visions of the Malayan Culture and Multiculturalism in Selected Movies**

For a term that is deemed unproblematic in contemporary Singapore society, it is critical to understand how multiculturalism evolved from the call

for Malayanization, which first started in the 1930s. Sir Cecil Clementi, the governor and commander-in-chief of the Straits settlements and the high commissioner for the Federated Malay States, suggested that “there can be no real sympathy between the various racial elements, resident in this peninsula, unless they can speak to each other in one and the same language ... that language cannot be English, cannot be Chinese, cannot be Tamil, but must be Malay” (Clementi 1933, 10). Separately, a letter written by Roland Braddell debated on the notion of Malayanization in the local press.<sup>8</sup> The writer disparaged how the British governor was ignoring the economic incentives to learn and speak English instead of Malay in order to “obtain the better kinds of employment in Singapore” (Braddell 1933, 6). His argument thus proposed that one needs to look beyond the issue of language and for the colonial administrators to introduce more concrete socioeconomic policies to break up ethnic enclaves or introduce political reforms that would benefit Malayan citizens in the future. Unfortunately, the eruption of WWII soon disrupted the discussions on Malayanization and it was only in 1946 that the white paper on “Organisation of the Colonial Service” drew people’s attention back to the urgency of recruiting more locals to take up the civil service in Singapore.

The most hotly debated issue by the 1950s soon returned to what constituted the Malayan culture and how to make Malay the lingua franca in Singapore. The main participants of this discussion, however, were not only the British colonial officers in Singapore and Malaya, but also film companies and individuals who saw the need to clarify the concept for citizens. A total of three movies were made in the period to examine the different interpretations of multiculturalism among the general populace. The earliest was a Mandarin film titled *Nyonya and Baba* (1957) starring the famous star couple Yen Chun and Li Li Hua, distributed by the Cathay Organization. In *Nyonya and Baba*, the actress Li Li Hua (who was known as Nyonya Tan) is depicted travelling on a slow-moving bullock cart. This uniquely Southeast Asian mode of transport, with the iconic curved roof made of *rumbia* (sago palm) or *nipah* leaves, hinted at the slow pace of living in Malacca as compared to travelling on planes, cars, or trains—all of which had become more common after the war. When

8 Although the article provides no biography for the writer in, Roland Braddell was possibly a lawyer cum author of several books related to the legal and historical developments in Singapore and Malaya. His publications include *Commentary on the Common Gaming Houses Ordinance of 1888* (1911), *The Law of the Straits Settlements: A Commentary* (1915), and *The Lights of Singapore* (1934) (Menon 1947).

interspersed with different shots of coconut trees and wooden huts, the movie presented a rural, idyllic setting of Malaya to the audience. In the movie, Li Li Hua frequently wears a form-fitting sarong *kebaya*—a traditional Malay costume consisting of an embroidered blouse and long dress wrapped around the waist. In a way, multiculturalism was subtly presented through the visual images of the sexy sarong *kebaya*, distinctive forms of transport and housing (known as *kampungs* in the local context), and the romance between Baba Lee (played by Yen Chun) and Nyonya Tan, on whom a happy ending is bestowed.

This movie also sought to produce a new memoryscape where the extent of urbanization in Malaya had been conveniently left out. In fact, statistics show that the declaration of emergency led to an estimated 592 new villages, which were set up in the Malay Peninsula, and many migrants from the jungle fringes and isolated farms were forcibly relocated (Wong 1991). By 1959, the government had successfully relocated over 750,000 persons (approximately 12 percent of the total population) where a significant proportion of new villages were appended to existing urban centers like Kuala Lumpur, Malacca, and Johor Bahru (Yaakob et al. 2012, 79–101). These were described as improved settlements for the people, with a supply of electricity and direct piped water to homes, schools, shops, and community centers, but scholar Tan Teng Phee (2020) notes that these settlements also came with enclosed or fenced boundaries to restrict movement, constant surveillance against the MCP. This urban aspect of cities like Malacca is deliberately omitted from the movie.

Kong Ngee's Cantonese film *Blood Valley* (1957) took a different approach to presenting multiculturalism on screen, featuring a young Malay woman named Solina (played by Molly Wu Kar) falling in love with a Chinese man named Yip Ching (played by Patrick Tse) in Singapore. Their relationship is frowned upon by Yip's mother, who seeks to break them up. At the behest of his mother, Yip travels to Hong Kong where he is warmly hosted by his wealthy aunt, Lam Yee, and Tsi Mei. It is love at first sight between Yip and Tsi Mei. Mysteriously, however, his two cousins meet with a series of accidents and die. Suspecting that it might be a hex placed on him, Yip returns to Singapore to confront Solina. Meanwhile, Solina is married to Ali (played by Keung Chung-Ping). In the heat of an argument, Ali takes a *keris* (dagger) to stab Yip but is stopped by Solina, causing the latter to be killed instead. Ali is thus charged by the local police for manslaughter. Returning to Hong Kong, Yip discovers that what happened was plotted by Lam Yee all along to get his attention. He realizes that Solina did not place a hex on him and manages to secure the release of Ali.

*Blood Valley* highlights the idea of reconciliation between different races as we see both Yip and Ali walking side by side down a road after the latter is let out from the prison. They hold each other by the shoulder, thus suggesting a close relationship. This ending also creates a strong impression among the audience and serves to reinforce the message that certain superstitions against the Malay community were untrue. Finally, *Blood Valley* utilizes Hong Kong as a backdrop to suggest seduction and violence underpinning the evildoings of Lam Yee (played by Patsy Kar Ling). For example, the female protagonist throws a lavish costume party at the request of her mother when Yip arrives to visit the family in Hong Kong. Wearing a mask and dressed in a fancy kimono, Lam Yee is able to momentarily seduce Yip into believing that she is the girl he loves (i.e., Tsi Mei). The multistory seaside mansion in which they live is also the place where Lam Yee plots the accident and suicide of Tsi Mei. This is a stark contrast to the plain single-story *kampung* (hut) found in Malaya where Solina lives.

The third film to explore multiculturalism is Shaw's Malay film *Sri Menanti* (1957). It was later dubbed into Mandarin and given a Chinese title *Malai fengyue* (马来风月), highlighting an interracial romance which takes place in an idyllic village. A Chinese musician Wang (played by Paul Chang Chung) has arrived at the village to stay for a short period of time with his uncle who is the owner of a Chinese medicine store. He is introduced to the head of Yang's family and Wang is asked to help audit his business accounts. One night, Wang is mesmerized by the singing of a beautiful Malay lady Fatimah (played by Zaiton). Although the party of Malay youths who had gathered for their regular singing and dancing was disrupted by Fatimah's father, Wang is able to recall and play the same tune sung by Fatimah on his flute after everyone leaves. Fatimah is very impressed by Wang's musical talents and she wonders aloud in her own bedroom if she has fallen in love with him. She concludes that "love is blind; I have never taught my heart to choose love based on a race or skin color."

Similar to the first two films, romance constitutes a key focus of *Sri Menanti*, but it chooses to present multiculturalism by showing how the couple finds a common interest in music—perceived to be an art form which could be appreciated across different races. The film is able to do so by cutting back and forth between Wang and Fatimah and zooming in on their facial expressions. For example, when Fatimah is singing a song, Wang is portrayed smiling and listening intently to her. In another scene, Fatimah returns from the pier with her Malay friend Sidek and they are both drawn immediately to Wang playing a tune on his flute. The film also has a scene where Wang plays his flute in harmony with a small group of Malay youths

playing on violins and guitars. In the ending scene of *Sri Menanti*, a sickly Fatimah approaches Wang and begs him to play a tune on his flute for her before she dies in his arms. It is then that Fatimah's father realizes that his daughter is deeply in love with Wang and that he should not have stopped them from getting married.

This movie was generally well received and possibly hyped up some interest among Hong Kong's film audience on a handful of other Malay film stars as well as the Indian film director Phani Majumdar (who directed *Sri Menanti*). For example, Phani Majumdar was featured in the *Kung Sheung Daily News* as a veteran director who directed Shaw's latest Mandarin film *The Circus* (1958). There were also several reports of P. Ramlee and Saloma visiting Hong Kong for *Ta Kung Pao* in 1962, as well as the inclusion of a lengthy singing and dancing scene in Shaw's Mandarin blockbuster *Love Parade* (1961) by the two Malay film stars. All these suggested that the idea of multiculturalism presented through the portrayal of non-Chinese actresses as well as their cultures (such as costume, music, song, and dance) had a certain degree of appeal to the overseas Chinese, even if it was short-lived, in Hong Kong during the 1950s and 1960s.

Some scholars may be quick to dismiss these films as being purely driven by business considerations. Yet, if we were to examine more closely the geopolitics in Southeast Asia and the close relationship connecting Singapore to Hong Kong during the Cold War, the varied and multilayered interpretations of multiculturalism on the silver screen suggest that commercial film companies were actively involved in the imagination, even though much of it was dominated by the colonial government and political leaders of Singapore during the pre- and post-independence years. They affirmed subtly that multiculturalism could be a useful tool that cut across different ethnic groups, and different film markets (Singapore, Malaya and Hong Kong), and that could be observed again in the film *My Love in Malaya* (1963) distributed by Shaw Organization.

### **Finding Commonalities of Heritage and Race among Countries in Southeast Asia**

In retrospect, the indeterminate status of Singapore prior to its full independence in August 1965 allowed the city to establish relationships with other Asian members within the global network. The relationship was forged in various ways. Sometimes Singapore claimed to be anti-colonialist and nationalist, or anticommunist but left-leaning. Other times, Singapore

claimed to be a state of nonalignment, thereby rejecting the major power blocs represented by both the United State and the Soviet Union. While these different ideologies might have been perplexing to the public, a unifying strategy adopted by political leaders in Singapore was to emphasize the importance of building a multiracial and multicultural society while film companies and individuals were encouraged to participate in the creative imaginations of multiculturalism too.<sup>9</sup>

For example, actress-cum-film director Chang Lye Lye completed her first Mandarin film *My Love in Malaya* in 1963, drawing inspirations from her own life experience (Wong 2018). Although Chang was born in China in 1938, she came with her family to Singapore when she was three years old and later grew up in Penang. Chang's parents operated an acrobatic troupe in China, and they traveled around parts of Southeast Asia to raise funds for China's anti-Japanese resistance prior to the fall of Singapore in 1942.<sup>10</sup> In the early 1950s, Chang started her own performing troupe where she was the manager and lead singer. She was also involved in choreographing song and dance performances and recruiting new talents to expand their array of programs. However, as her repertoire usually consisted of popular folk songs from China, this caused the local police to suspect her of promoting communism in Singapore. In a performance at Kuching (in Sarawak), Chang was also harassed for performing a Russian song. The strong anticommunist sentiments in the Malay Peninsula eventually resulted in her closure of the performing troupe and she switched her career from singing to acting in her first Malay film *Selamat Tinggal Kekasihku* (Goodbye my love) in 1955, directed by L. Krishnan for Cathay-Keris in Singapore. She then moved to Hong Kong to produce several music records with major companies like Pathe and Philips which shot her to fame. Subsequently, she was invited by Ho Ah Loke to return to Singapore and offered an opportunity to direct her own movie, but the plan was later terminated in 1960. To make ends meet, Chang wrote the film script for *My Love in Malaya* and showed it to

9 In the late 1950s and early 1960s, individuals could discuss multiculturalism, or more broadly the Malayan culture, at symposiums, or through open letters or essay writing competitions organized by local newspapers or clan associations. The Shaw Organization also called for submission of stories or film scripts related to people's living experiences in Singapore and Malaya through their own film magazines and in newspapers such as *Nanyang Siang Pau*. See "Shaw Has Decided to Shoot Malayanized Film Locally." *Nanyang Siang Pau*. 8. 2 July 1959.

10 See the interview with Chang Lye Lye at the National Archives of Singapore, accession number 002465. *My Love in Malaya* was distributed and exhibited by the Shaw Organization, reaping huge success at the box office, including in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, and Thailand.

Chua Boon Hean, a scriptwriter for MFP who eventually recommended it to the Shaw Organization.<sup>11</sup>

While the production costs were born by Chang herself, *My Love in Malaya* was assisted by the MFP's veteran photographer Chow Cheng Kok, and Chua Boon Hean wrote the lyrics for the movie's theme song *Rambutan*. It was screened in the chain of cinemas owned by the Shaw Organization across various countries in Southeast Asia. The movie starts with the journey of a musician Chen Meng Ping (played by actor Jin Feng) who travels from Hong Kong to Malacca to look for inspiration and help his best friend locate the whereabouts of his fiancée. He soon falls in love with a *nyonya* Bao Niang (played by Lan Di) but realizes that she is his best friend's fiancée. Chen's best friend later arrives in Malacca and finds his true love (played by Chang Lye Lye). He agrees to cancel his wedding engagement with Bao Niang, allowing Chen to profess his love and reunite with the latter.

Visually, the movie presents the newly independent nation Malaysia as predominantly rural people from different ethnicities who often come together for social gatherings in the village. What makes this movie unique are the songs written by Chang Lye Lye. Known to be a popular singer herself, Chang's songs reflect the diversity of language, food, and culture in this region. For example, her songs are inspired by Indonesian folk songs such as *Buka Pintu* sung by Anneke Gronloh, while her song lyrics feature a mix of Chinese and Malay dialogue, incorporating local cuisines like *goreng pisang* (fried banana), *otah* (a food blending raw fish, chopped onions, coconut milk, herbs, and spices), *bubur cha cha* (a type of dessert), etc. This coincided with the strategy adopted by political leaders to make Malay the lingua franca of Singapore, and, clearly, individuals had begun to internalize multiculturalism as a way of life by creating a creole language.

For the Shaw Organization, who first saw the potential in Chang's work, steering away from the cityscape of Singapore/Malaya was a wise choice as it not long ago had been the site for numerous strikes and social unrest instigated by the MCP in the mid-1950s. A rural setting was more likely to be passed by the film censors as it was also in sync with other works created by the Malayan Film Unit (MFU) which tended to depict the region as largely agrarian and its people as simple-minded individuals, vulnerable to communists' threats.<sup>12</sup>

11 The interview with Chua Boon Hean is also available at the National Archives of Singapore, accession number 001157.

12 For an analysis of MFU documentaries and feature films, see chapter 3 of Hee (2019). Affiliated with the department of information of the British colonial government, the MFU was started in 1946 in Kuala Lumpur; it soon emerged as the largest documentary film producer in Asia to focus on producing a series of documentaries and feature films with a strong anticommunist

On the other hand, having to deal with the fierce competition from Loke Wan Tho who promoted his brand of Mandarin and Malay movies as vehicles of modernity, the Shaw Organization chose to differentiate their products by highlighting the multicultural aspects unique to Singapore and Malaya. The final point was that the concept of multiculturalism easily allowed the Shaw Organization to distribute and exhibit the films in different parts of Southeast Asia like Thailand and Philippines, where Chinese formed the largest ethnic minority group and were increasingly encouraged to assimilate (Hall 1981). The allure of interracial romance on-screen was thus not just a fictional portrayal but one imbued with optimism as newly independent nations came to accept the overseas Chinese community as part of their citizens. However, a paradox with *My Love in Malaya* was that the film, while proven to be hugely popular with the audience, did not lead to more Malayan/Malayanized Chinese films being produced in Singapore after 1965. The theme of multiculturalism seemed to disappear abruptly from the silver screen and emerged in a different format on television programs and theatrical performances in post-independence Singapore.

## Conclusion

Since 1965, the vision for racial harmony and multiculturalism was firmly embraced as the core identity of Singapore with the tendency to organize Singaporeans into three main racial groups—Chinese, Malay and Indian—in order to facilitate public administration and policymaking (Chua 2009). Interracial marriage in Singapore has also become more common, accounting for more than one-fifth of all marriages in Singapore in the twenty-first century (Tan 2018). The current prime minister of Singapore Lee Hsien Loong also emphasizes that the country “is not a melting pot, but a society where each race is encouraged to preserve its unique culture and traditions and appreciate and respect that of others” (Lee 2017). In a recent survey among 1,000 Singaporeans on what constitutes an important aspect of their identity, three in five Singaporeans (60 percent) said a multiracial and multireligious society, whereas 44 percent chose Singlish, which refers to an English-based creole language spoken locally, incorporating elements of Chinese and Malay (Zhou 2020).

emphasis. It even had its own dubbing department to better serve the diverse linguistic demands in Southeast Asia and to generate income from compulsory screenings of these works.

To conclude, this essay is an attempt to highlight the various images of multiculturalism as presented in movies or interpreted by individuals against the backdrop of Cold War politics in Asia. Beyond the heated discussions on the concept which had been dominated by political leaders back in the 1950s and 1960s, film companies like the Shaw Organization played an integral part, often investing time and capital to extrapolate the theme of multiculturalism in their film productions. Yet, the participation of movie producers in promoting multiculturalism was often overlooked in the mainstream historical narratives. From today's perspective, credit should be given to them for shaping a memoryscape of multiculturalism, distributing visual impressions of it through extensive film networks and connecting people across disparate cities in Southeast Asia who consumed and appreciated these fleeting images on screen.

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Films analyzed in article:

*Nyonya and Baba* (1956)

*Blood Valley* (1957)

*Sri Menanti* (1957)

*My Love in Malaya* (1963)

### **About the Author**

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## 12. Urban Planning as Cold War Battleground: How Singapore Built Its Nation-State by Defeating the Barisan Sosialis

*Yan Bo*

**Abstract:** This chapter unearths how the leftists in the early days of the Republic of Singapore were influenced by Maoism and posed a challenge to Singapore's nation-state building in the context of the Cold War. It uses a thorough reading of the rarely referenced publications by the now-defunct Barisan Sosialis, the most powerful opposition party and leftist force in the history of the republic. The origins of Singapore's public housing and homeownership scheme as the Singapore government's bloodless way of combating the radical leftist challenges posed by the Barisan Sosialis are traced by documenting and analyzing the ruling party's countermeasures in the field of urban planning. The chapter conceptualizes Singapore's public housing as a miniature of the struggles between Malayan nationalism/communism on one side and conservatism/anti-communism on the other in the context of the global Cold War. In short, Singapore's domestic constructions are also Cold War landscapes.

**Keywords:** Singapore, Maoism, Barisan Sosialis, HDB, homeownership, Cold War landscape

### Introduction

In the early days of the Republic of Singapore, the now-defunct Barisan Sosialis, at one time the most powerful opposition party, emboldened by Maoism, launched a radical leftist wave at the nation building of the young republic. The ruling party, the People's Action Party (PAP) countered by

building its legitimacy in the battleground of urban planning, most notably the well-known public housing and home ownership scheme. In this chapter I trace the origins of Singapore's public housing and home ownership scheme as the Singapore government's bloodless way of combating the radical leftist challenges posed by the Barisan Sosialis. By defeating the Barisan Sosialis, Singapore eventually became a reality. Singapore's public housing takes on the shape of a miniature of the struggles between Malayan nationalism/communism on one side and conservatism/anti-communism on the other in the context of the global Cold War in Singapore. Singapore's domestic constructions are thus also Cold War landscapes.

Barisan Sosialis, meaning "socialist front" in Bahasa Melayu, was the strongest-ever opposition party and the most powerful radical leftist force in the history of the Republic of Singapore. In 1959, Singapore held its first general elections after the British granted full internal self-governance. The elections saw the PAP, then comprised of both conservative, right-wing, English-educated elites, and radical, left-wing, Chinese-language, socialist-leaning activists, achieve a landslide victory, winning forty-three seats out of fifty-one in the assembly. In 1961, the two sides within the PAP came into a conflict over the issue of merger with Malaysia. The pro-communist, left-wing faction, who were strongly against the merger with Malaysia, included thirteen members of the legislative assembly who split from the PAP and formed the Barisan Sosialis (Drysdale 1984, 283). Dr. Lee Siew Choh (李绍祖) was the party chairman. Other notable members included Lim Chin Siong (林清祥), Chia Thye Poh (谢太宝), and Sandrasegaran Woodhull. Seventy percent of the PAP members left and joined the Barisan Sosialis (Cheah 2006). On 3 February 1963, the Singapore government carried out Operation Coldstore which detained more than 100 political activists, including many prominent members of the Barisan Sosialis. The operation severely weakened the Barisan Sosialis and paved the way for Singapore's merger with Malaysia; it also triggered intensified domestic political confrontations between the Barisan Sosialis and the ruling party. The story in this chapter unfolds in the context of the internal political confrontations between radical leftists and conservative ruling elites right after Singapore's independence on 9 August 1965, the fiery global 1960s marked by China's Cultural Revolution, the rising propaganda of Maoism, and an intensified Cold War in Southeast Asia.

Current studies are already abundant when it comes to efforts by the Singapore government in curbing the influence of communism for nation building after independence (Singh 2015). For instance, some scholars focus on the language policy and the shutting down of Chinese-medium schools

(Liu and Ricks 2012; Bokhorst-Heng 1999; Huang 2019; Kwok 2001). Others focus on civil and urban planning where efforts were aimed at forging the national identity of Singapore (Henderson 2012; Kong 2007). On the other hand, previous studies spared no efforts writing about Singapore's urban planning projects, such as public housing or the Housing Development Board (HDB). For example, Kah Seng Loh linked the 1961 Bukit Ho Swee fire and the subsequent public housing project of HDB, arguing that the aftermath of the Bukit Ho Swee fire was a seminal event in modern Singapore (Loh 2013). Belinda Yuen also traces a general history of Singapore's public housing project from the perspectives of squatters and low-income families (Yuen 2017). Meanwhile, there are plenty of studies which examine Singapore's public housing in terms of economic and welfare considerations (Bocquet 2015; Shatkin 2014; Lee and Yu 2012).

Housing policies are battlegrounds in Singapore and elsewhere, though Singapore's housing policies born and developed in the context of the Cold War sit at the juncture of multiple historical encounters. Singapore's public housing has already established itself as an essential component of the nation-branding of the republic. In this chapter I suggest that the political origins of the urban planning projects, particularly the public housing and ownership scheme, can be traced to the Singapore government's combating the radical leftist challenges posed by the Barisan Sosialis. Among the life-and-death battles between the radical leftists and conservatives around the world during the Cold War, the Singapore government's bloodless victory was quite rare. A study of the rarely examined aspects of the origins of Singapore's public housing shows that Singapore's public housing was its local response to the global Cold War in which domestic constructions became Cold War landscapes.

To support this argument, I examine the organizational publications of the Barisan Sosialis, particularly the *Barisan Sosialis Front (BSF)*, a rarely referenced publication which is often overshadowed by the official documents and archives in the studies of Singapore. Currently, Yinghong Cheng (2011) is the only other scholar who has reviewed this publication. Cheng's major contribution was to unearth the demise of radical leftism in Singapore. I will focus on how Singapore's nation building was used to defeat radicalism and show that defeating radical leftism was one significant component of Singapore's nation building.

I will begin with the Barisan Sosialis's theoretical adherence to Maoism, and their opposition to various social policies launched by the ruling political party, and then continue to the ruling party's victory over radical leftism by winning "hearts and minds" through social and urban construction

represented by various urban planning projects. I do not attempt to provide a whole picture of the ruling elites' actions to build the Singapore nation, as the ruling party's concrete actions in Singapore's nation building have already been meticulously documented, in both the memoirs of Singapore's politicians (K. Y. Lee 2000; Latif 2009; Peh 2021) and a voluminous research output (Ortmann 2009; Wong and Huang 2011; Hong 2007; Barr and Skrbiš 2008). Among the ample writings on Singapore's urban planning, there are hardly any approaching urban planning from the perspective of battling communism in a Cold War setting.

### **Barisan Sosialis's Embrace of Maoism**

When the Barisan Sosialis was founded in 1961, its Maoist imprint was not obvious, at least not visible from its *Party Constitution and Regulations*. The party constitution stated that the aim of the party was to eliminate colonialism and build an independent and unified Malayan nation comprised of the federated states of Malaya (today's Peninsular Malaysia) and the island of Singapore (today's Republic of Singapore) (*Party Constitution and Regulations of the Barisan Sosialis*). After the independence of the Republic of Singapore and the rise of global Maoism, the Barisan Sosialis turned rapidly to Maoism as their theoretical weapon against the government. The Barisan Sosialis openly implemented Maoism in their daily publicity and practices. For instance, in the 1968 new year resolution released by the editorial department of the *BSF*, the Barisan Sosialis declared that they would place propagating Mao Zedong thought as their central job in 1968:

The year 1967 was the year the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution achieved its decisive victory. The victory symbolized that the entire world had entered an era with Mao Zedong Thought as its flag and that the centre of the world revolution had shifted to Beijing ...

In this great era, in this glorious year, the people of Malaya had been following the direction of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution of China, taking Mao Zedong Thought as the weapon, and undertaking struggles across the country against American and British imperialism and Tunku Abdul Rahman/Lee Kuan Yew puppet group. The revolutionary masses of Malaya did their very best to learn, apply, and propagate Mao Zedong Thought, and carry out the right policy with Mao Zedong Thought as its guiding principle ...

Our party organ, the *Barisan Sosialis Front*, propagated Mao Zedong Thought, publicized the correct extra-parliamentary road for struggle, reported the struggles by the masses, and expressed people's voices. (1 January 1968)

The *BSF* page commemorating the seventh anniversary of the party in this issue announced that “we [the Barisan Sosialis] will continue to implement Mao Zedong Thought widely and deeply. We will associate Mao Zedong Thought with the revolutionary practices of Malaya and use Mao Zedong Thought to direct the revolutionary practices of Malaya, to ensure the eventual victory of the revolution.”

Mao is mentioned in the pages of the *Barisan Sosialis Front* far more times than their own party chairman Dr. Lee Siew Choh. During the 1 May 1969 celebration, Dr. Lee Siew Choh spoke candidly that the future work of the leftists should be “guided by Mao Zedong Thought and the mass line” (*BSF* 4 May 1969) The Barisan Sosialis required their comrades “to learn and apply Mao Zedong Thought strictly, solemnly, and flexibly to initiate struggles against any faulty thoughts of the non-proletariat classes ... [to] actively propagate, implement, and defend Mao Zedong Thought and the correct mass line for struggle” (*BSF* 11 May 1969). In another commemorative event, around two hundred young students paraded the streets with a huge portrait of Chairman Mao in the front, while loudly chanting “Long Live Chairman Mao” (*BSF* 25 May 1969).

In the 1960s, Maoism had become the theoretical underpinning of the Barisan Sosialis's decision to boycott the Singapore parliament and its elections. Maoism, with its rejection of revisionism, opposed any possibility of a peaceful and parliamentary road to socialism. Besides, at the core of the ethos in Maoism was that it placed high value on violence and the popular masses. Maoism emphasized armed struggles and despised any peaceful attempts as opportunistic and revisionist. Partly for this reason, Mao's China attacked the Soviet Union when Nikita Khrushchev offered his famous theory of peaceful coexistence with the West. As loyal and ardent worshippers of Mao, the Barisan Sosialis members rejected any parliamentary approach and the elections in both Singapore and Malaysia.

Historically, the Barisan Sosialis achieved an election result that has not been matched by any other opposition party in Singapore's history to this day. The general elections held in September 1963 witnessed the biggest victory achieved by any opposition party in Singapore history. Even though most Barisan Sosialis leaders were absent—detained during the previous year's Operation Coldstore—the Barisan Sosialis won thirteen

seats of the fifty-one-member legislative assembly, the precursor to today's Parliament of Singapore. The election results made the Barisan Sosialis the second-largest political party in Singapore. Since then, no opposition party has ever managed to match the Barisan Sosialis in number or percentage of seats in Singapore's parliament.

Leaving aside the debates over the genuineness of the democracy and constitutionality of Singapore at the time, the Barisan Sosialis, with the best election results for any opposition party in Singapore's history on hand, indeed had an opportunity to use the parliament as a prominent battlefield. However, by boycotting the parliament and the parliamentary elections, they had given up this platform and handed it over to their political opponents. As the second-largest political party in the Singapore parliament, by October 1966 nine Barisan Sosialis members of the Singapore parliament, headed by Chia Thye Poh, resigned (*BSF* 8 October 1966), an act that would be later described as "another fatal mistake after the rejection of independence" (Cheng 2011). By resigning from the "hypocrite" Parliament of Singapore, the Barisan Sosialis announced that they would undertake the mass struggle outside parliament, calling their departure from the parliament "bad news for the imperialists and their lackey, the Lee Kuan Yew fascists control" but "a big good thing for people struggling for national liberation and democracy" (*BSF* 8 October 1966). Of all the political moves that the Barisan Sosialis made to oppose the PAP government under their radicalization by Maoism, their boycott of the Singapore parliament and parliamentary elections in the 1960s was often seen as the decisive factor in their decline (*BSF* 8 October 1966).

### The Barisan Sosialis's Attack on the PAP's Policies

As shown above, the Barisan Sosialis embraced Maoism as the guiding ideology of the party in their political struggles against the PAP. Out of such a theoretical inclination, the Barisan Sosialis adopted a Maoist model of class economic base exploitation in their analyses of societies in Singapore and Malaysia, just as Mao did for Chinese society before 1949. This resulted in them regarding Singapore as one part of the "enemy-occupied area" (*dizhanqu* 敌占区, *BSF* 10 December 1972). This was a particular term that the Chinese communists used to refer to areas within the sphere of influence of the Kuomintang during the Chinese revolution.

With this self-imagination of Singapore as "enemy-occupied area," the Barisan Sosialis rejected both the merger of Malaysia and the subsequent

independence of Singapore as neo-imperialist plots. In addition to boycotting the parliament of Singapore and parliamentary elections, the Barisan Sosialis actively and staunchly opposed every policy undertaken by the ruling PAP, in the following three aspects.

### 1. *Citizenship and Employment*

The issue over the citizenship of the Republic of Singapore became the point of contention between the ruling PAP and the Barisan Sosialis. The Barisan Sosialis considered Singapore and Malaya as a whole and rejected the sovereignty and citizenship in both the Federation of Malaysia and the Republic of Singapore.

All throughout the newsletters of the *BSF*, each time the Barisan Sosialis mentions the words “motherland,” or “our country,” they mean “Malaya” (including Singapore) (*BSF* 2 June 1968). The “national identity” that the Barisan Sosialis defined and advocated was not an exclusive “Chinese nation,” or a “Singapore nation,” but a “Malayan nation,” namely a nation formed by Chinese, Malays, Indians, and other ethnicities living in Malaya (*BSF* 27 October 1968). When addressing the significance of struggling for a “unified Malaya,” the first emphasis by Dr. Lee Siew Choh was “to build the correct awareness of a Malayan nation and to defeat the plot of the British and American imperialism and the regimes of Tunku Abdul Rahman and Lee Kuan Yew in creating the hypocrite and reactionary concepts of ‘Malaysians’ and ‘Singaporeans’” (*BSF* 4 May 1969).

In addition to rejecting the Republic of Singapore as an independent and sovereign state, the Barisan Sosialis categorized citizenship as “Rahman-Lee Kuan Yew regime’s division of and persecution against” people (*BSF* 15 September 1968). The Barisan Sosialis also defined citizenship as the “rule of darkness,” and “an official declaration of ‘separate and rule’” (*BSF* 6 October 1968). The dual rejection of the existence of the Federation of Malaysia and the Republic of Singapore led Dr. Lee Siew Choh to state that Singapore was to Malaya what Taiwan was to Mainland China. The Barisan Sosialis went as far as to attack the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea) when it recognized Singapore as a sovereign republic (*BSF* 6 October 1968).

In the wake of Singapore’s independence and the finalization of the national boundaries of the Federation of Malaysia, both states initiated nation-state building within their borders. In Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew demarcated citizens from noncitizens through job opportunities. Access to job opportunities was only available for citizens of the Republic of Singapore. “Replacing non-Singaporeans with Singaporeans” was undertaken

in the name of “taking care of Singaporeans” (*BSF* 31 March 1968). Across the causeway, Malaysian prime minister Tunku Abdul Rahman took similar measures that prohibited Singaporean citizens from working in Johor Bahru, Malaysia (*BSF* 31 March 1968). The Barisan Sosialis opposed these concrete actions. In the 274th Issue of the *BSF*, the Barisan Sosialis condemned such actions as persecution: “it was estimated that people persecuted by Lee Kuan Yew amounted to roughly 20 thousand, and those persecuted by Rahman were about 30 thousand, and the reactionary measure had impacted some 150 to 200 thousand people” (*BSF* 31 March 1968). Given the nature of the *BSF* as a party organ, the numbers listed were possibly exaggerated, but it was indeed a reference of the measures taken by both governments to draw a clear demarcation along the citizenship issue. This also led the Barisan Sosialis to strongly oppose the introduction of a “work permit” system in both Malaysia and Singapore as a plot to “divide and rule” (*BSF* 7 and 14 September 1969) and create the “reactionary concepts of ‘Malaysian’ and ‘Singaporean’ within the Malayan people” (*BSF* 14 September 1969).

## 2. *Military conscription*

For male citizens of Singapore, military conscription was an issue closely related to citizenship (Suryadinata 2015; Ho and Ong-Webb 2019). Also, for the young Republic of Singapore, the national service served as one of the powerful means in national integration and the forging of a unified national identity. One statement by the ministry of defense of Singapore explained the contribution of compulsory military training to nation building in that “national service will provide an opportunity for all races to come to know one another better in an environment in which they will start to love their nation, to understand social obligations and develop civic mindedness and strength of character” (Quah 1977).

Thus, male conscription became a constant and frequent topic in the Barisan Sosialis newsletter which attacked Singapore’s national service as service to British and American imperialism (*BSF* 2 June 1968). The son of Dr. Lee Siew Choh was a conscientious objector who was therefore fined for failing to register (Blackburn 2013). In 1964, the Barisan Sosialis interpreted the National Service Registration as an ideological struggle of two roads: one, the “correct” mass line (another of Mao’s terms) espoused by the party, and, second, the one which the Barisan Sosialis called the “anti-revolutionary right-wing opportunist” path. Revoking the citizenship of those who were involved in radical leftist politics was used by both authorities in Malaysia and Singapore to combat radical leftism. Cases of activists who were stripped

of their Malaysian or Singaporean citizenship were also common among the leftist groups.

### 3. *National border*

Another area in which the Barisan Sosialis conflicted with the authorities in Singapore and Malaysia in nation building was the clear-cut national boundary and border. When Chia Thye Poh and Lee Siew Choh were banned by the Malaysian authority from entering Malaysia for life for their political activism, a protesting article in the *BSF* stated: “We consider Malaya as our motherland and the country we hold loyalty to, regardless of whether we live in Singapore or continental Malaya, we are all Malaysians, not Singaporeans or Malaysians. As Malaysians, we are entitled to move in our land. The Singapore-Johor Causeway is just a bridge, not a political fence” (*BSF* 5 November 1966). Geographically, Dr. Lee defined Malaya as the peninsula in the south of Thailand, which comprised Penang and Singapore (*BSF* 1 January 1967). After the separation of Singapore from Malaysia, the Barisan Sosialis, with their long-time opposition to the creation of Malaysia, did not celebrate it but continued to bash Lee Kuan Yew and the PAP for the fake independence that did not grant true independence, freedom, and democracy to the people of Singapore. The Barisan Sosialis even mocked the famous scene of Lee Kuan Yew’s emotional breakdown in front of the press in their newsletter (*BSF* 14 August 1965).

## **Winning Hearts and Minds: PAP Strikes Back with Urban Planning**

The political offensive launched by the Barisan Sosialis forced the PAP to respond. Mere actions in the military (Dartford 1960), intelligence, and public security spheres might be effective at physically deterring the leftists (Lee 2012); however, they were not enough to win trust and support from the public. To win the hearts and minds of citizens of the young nation in fending off ideological challenges posed by the Barisan Sosialis in the 1960s, the PAP responded by building its own legitimacy through various urban planning programs, in addition to the continuous detention and deportation of political dissidents. Urban planning has been instrumental in eventually forging a national identity of Singapore (Bullock 2014; Giok 1994).

In 1968, the Singapore government took several initiatives on sanitation and urban cleaning, such as the “Keep Singapore Clean” campaign launched in October, and the passage of the *Destruction of Disease-Bearing*

*Insects Bill* (1968) three months earlier. For the first time in the history of Singapore, fines were used to control social behavior. Police, special constabulary, and the public health inspectorate sent officers to patrol and advise members of the public against littering and water-stagnation hazards. Those who were caught littering were warned of the penalties during the campaign; once the campaign ended, first-time litterbugs were fined up to S\$500, while repeat offenders were fined up to S\$2,000 (Nathan 1995). The concept of “cleanliness” has thus been gradually constructed as part of Singapore’s national identity (Rose 2021). The Barisan Sosialis, however, interpreted the act as an exploitation of the poor when twenty rag pickers were called before the court and faced with fines (*BSF* 29 September 1968). Similarly, the Barisan Sosialis condemned the passage of the *Destruction of Disease-Bearing Insects Bill* as putting a new burden on the poor (*BSF* 29 September 1968).

The “Keep Singapore Clean” campaign in October 1968 was one of the first national campaigns after Singapore’s independence in 1965. The government believed that improved environmental conditions would not only enhance the quality of life for Singaporeans and cultivate national pride, but also attract foreign investors and tourists to Singapore (Chia 2012). Labelling the “Keep Singapore Clean” campaign a sinister political deception and a vicious conspiracy, the Barisan Sosialis further analyzed these campaigns as a means of shifting people’s attention from the deteriorating economic and political crisis. They asserted that, besides distracting people from the “cruel control, exploitation, and oppression of the imperialism and its lackeys,” these campaigns had an additional economic aim. These were to use fines to generate state income and shift the cost of developing tourism to the ordinary people (*BSF* 13 October 1968). The Barisan Sosialis also criticized the new “Keep Singapore Clean and Mosquito Free” campaign as looting the people to make up for the huge expenditure of the bureaucratic apparatus (*BSF* 9 November 1969). The editor of the party’s newsletter, pen-named Xiang Donghong (向东红 “facing the east which is red,” a Maoist adulation), commented that the primary purpose of the mosquito destruction campaign was to collect taxes from the people and impose severe exploitation (*BSF* 13 August 1969):

From the newspaper reporting, this Mosquito campaign will be island wide. They said they [government authority] would go to public places, and even every area to eliminate mosquitoes.

Meanwhile they would set up trash cans and ask people not to litter about trash and fruits waste. In the circumstance that people in the rural

area fail to comply with this Mosquito campaign, they would be fined or brought to court. The reactionary regime of Lee Kuan Yew spared no efforts in ruthlessly exploiting the people, their sinister means, at the end of the day, would only “shoot in their foot.” Even fine penalties upon those who spat around were criticized as another way for the PAP government to “loot money.” (*BSF*, 22 November 1969)

Out of the various urban planning projects launched by the PAP, the public housing scheme was a notable one. It was not just the public housing that helped the PAP to battle the Barisan Sosialis; the “Home Ownership for the People” scheme was also instrumental. In February 1960, the HDB was established to replace the Singapore Improvement Trust. Lim Kim San, the first chairman of the HDB, had already initiated building public housing to alleviate the housing shortage (Latif 2009, 91). For example, in selecting Lim Kim San as the 1965 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Community Leadership, the Board of Trustees recognized that under Lim’s leadership at HDB, “completing construction of one new apartment every 45 minutes, on the average, at a cost of less than US\$3.00 per square foot, the government can offer every applicant a new home within three days (at monthly rents of \$7.00 to \$20.00)” (Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation, n.d.).

In February 1964, a “Home Ownership for the People” scheme was launched, enabling lower middle-income group citizens to own their own homes. Limited to those with an income not exceeding \$800 a month, the scheme offered loans to those who could not buy property outright so that they could pay less-than-rent sums instalments after initial deposit payments. The scheme was designed as an incentive for “people to buy their homes, become a property owner, and develop a stake in a country to which he was now rooted” (Latif 2009, 92). Following the home ownership scheme, the fraction of HDB housing units in rental occupancy fell from 100 percent in the early 1960s to 76 percent at the end of 1970, to 38 percent in 1981, and to 16 percent in 1989 (Latif 2009, 92). One 2021 statistic reports that the home ownership rate among residents in Singapore was, at 88.9 percent (78.3 percent were HDB flats), one of the highest in the world (Department of Statistics Singapore 15 February 2022).

As most research and studies approach Singapore’s public housing from the perspective of antipoverty and welfare arrangements, very few studies have traced the origins of Singapore’s public housing and home ownership arrangements to the anticommunist cause, despite Lim Kim San’s recollections and Lee Kuan Yew’s various statements. During a 1985 interview,

Lim remarked: "Once you own a property, you become more stable, isn't it? ... So between the alternative of having a home and having a job and going out into the streets and fighting the government and fighting the authority, between the two, most people would choose to stay at home. Yes." (Latif 2009, 93). Lee had consistently associated home ownership with social stability and believed the sense of having a property in combating social chaos. He wrote in his memoir:

After observing how differently people maintained their own apartments as against rented ones, I believed that deep sense of property was instinctive in a person. During the riots of the 1950s and early 1960s, people would join in the rioting, stone windshields, overturn cars, and burn them. When riots broke out in the mid-1960s, after they owned homes and property, they acted differently. I saw young men carrying their scooters parked on the roads to safety up the stairs of their HDB blocks. I was strengthened in my resolve to give every family solid assets which I was confident they would protect and defend, especially their home. I was not wrong. (Lee 2000, 96)

The public housing and home ownership scheme was meant to win the hearts and minds among citizens of Singapore against the radical leftists. Although there is a lack of evidence as of writing, the selections of key milestone housing projects were also possibly intentional, aiming directly at residents living in the areas where Barisan Sosialis was popular. For example, Queenstown (see fig. 12.1) was the headquarters of the Barisan Sosialis, and it was the site for the first completed set of the HDB flats. It was also the place where the "Home Ownership for the People" scheme was launched (see fig. 12.2). In 1966, the HDB built its very first housing block with an integrated Hawker Centre in Havelock. The same year also witnessed the completion of the first phase of public housing flats in the satellite town of Toa Payoh. The first blocks of four-room flats were completed in Henderson Crescent, Redhill, Singapore in 1966. In early 1968, the HDB blocks construction spread into Rochore. These said places, namely, Havelock, Toa Payoh, Redhill (Bukit Merah), and Rochore, were all Barisan Sosialis-concentrated places. The Barisan Sosialis boycotted the 1968 general elections of Singapore. When they made a U-turn to participate in the 1972 general elections, these places were among the limited constituencies that they chose to contest. For example, Dr. Lee Siew Choh, chairman of the Barisan Sosialis, contested in the Rochore constituency ("1972 Parliamentary General Election Results").



Figure 12.1. Queenstown, Singapore, the site of the first completed set of the HDB flats (photographed by the author, September 2019).

The success of the public housing and home ownership scheme contributed to the election victories of the PAP. From 1968 to 1981, candidates from the PAP had won all but one constituency they contested. They swept all seats in the 1968, 1972, 1976, and 1980 general elections, and it was not until 1981 that an opposition party member, Joshua Benjamin Jeyaretnam became the first opposition politician to be elected to parliament since Singapore's independence in 1965. Lee Kuan Yew also recounted the importance of the completion of two HDB blocks in his election victory in the 1963 election:

He [Lim Kim San] built two blocks of flats comprising 324 units along Cantonment Road in my Tanjong Pagar constituency. At the election time in September 1963, it was half completed. Huge crowds of leftist students from the Chinese middle schools and Nanyang University worked the ground, visiting nearly every household in Tanjong Pagar. They wanted to unseat me. These two uncompleted blocks of flats reminded the people that I could complete the building of the few hundred homes, not these leftists. I was re-elected. (Latif 2009, VIII)

He also said that “Had it not been nearing completion at the time of the next election; I might not have been re-elected” (Lee 2000, 344)



Figure 12.2. A typical HDB block in Jurong West, Singapore, with a signature block number on the building (photographed by the author, January 2020).

## A Singapore Identity Took Root: Maoism Waned on Singapore's Soil

When the PAP dominated parliamentary elections in Singapore, realizing their blueprint for nation building via their various social constructions, the Barisan Sosialis had sensed their crisis of survival. After boycotting the parliament of Singapore and the parliamentary elections since 1968, the Barisan Sosialis made a U-turn in 1972, announcing they would contest in the coming elections, admitting "the situation has changed ... it is completely unnecessary to continue the boycott" (*BSF* 21 May 1972). What did the Barisan Sosialis mean by "the situation has changed"? As the Barisan Sosialis followed Maoism and watched the Cultural Revolution and China affairs closely, the changes in Mao's China provided some insights. Besides the 1971 Lin Biao Incident dealing a blow to the fanaticism of the Cultural Revolution, Chairman Mao, the idol of the global antiimperialist fighters and antiestablishment rebels, stunned the leftists worldwide by inviting US President Richard Nixon, the head of the biggest imperialist empire, to officially visit China in 1972. The impact of the Lin Biao Incident on the Barisan Sosialis was unclear, as it is not seen from the currently available Barisan Sosialis publications, but Mao's welcome of Nixon instantly triggered the reactions of the Barisan Sosialis.

The thirty-sixth issue of Barisan Sosialis's *Party Information* printed a front-page article titled "The Crisis the Party is Facing." In the article, Dr. Lee Siew Choh expressed his anxiety and confusion over questions such as "What results could the negotiations between China and Washington bring?" and "What does it mean by Nixon's visit to Beijing?" China's changing attitudes toward Malaysia, such as China's suspension of attacks on Malaysia and Lee Kuan Yew, donation from the Red Cross Society of China to its counterpart in Malaysia, and mutual visits of trade representatives of both countries also caused concern among the Barisan Sosialis. Contrary to the confidence shown on the *BSF*, what Lee expressed via *Party Information* was pessimistic:

Some of the comrades in our Party who saw China's foreign policy today, have turned low in spirit, even to the point of completely giving up struggling ... Meanwhile, our Party has dealt with issues according to the leftist theories and principles and has been supporting China's general path of socialism. If China compromises with the U.S. imperialism, then it would deal an inevitable blow to us.

China's Cultural Revolution has a massive impact on the thoughts of our comrades. During the Cultural Revolution, all sorts of ideas came out of

it and spread out, leading many of our comrades to make radical “leftist” mistakes. Some of the remarks, in the circumstances of China, might be correct. However, when they were transplanted onto the island of Singapore and the Barisan Sosialis, things were completely different. Yet some of our comrades mechanically invoked and applied some remarks and quotations, without associating them with the actual situations in Singapore ... some of the statements on the Cultural Revolution of China had harmful and detrimental influence over our party. This phenomenon was because many comrades of our party lacked experience; they didn’t have a concrete analysis of concrete issues. (*Party Information* 23 September 1971)

Faced with this “half-alive-half-dead” situation, the Barisan Sosialis decided to contest the 1972 general elections. Their platform is listed below (*BSF* 27 August 1972):

1. A genuine independent, democratic, unified Malaya (including Singapore island)
2. Freedom of thought and speech. Immediate and unconditional release of all political detainees
3. Loosen the regulations on citizenship
4. Abolish the Johor-Singapore Causeway restrictions
5. Abolish Fascist acts, especially the *Employment Act, Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act*
6. Abolish draft and “National Service”
7. Terminate immediately forced relocation and “urban planning”
8. Lower the HDB rent
9. Stop oppressing hawkers and taxi drivers
10. Freedom of education, abolish the “study permit”
11. Free medical care for the poor
12. Gender equality and equal pay
13. Improve the lives of peasants and fishermen
14. Promote national industry and commerce
15. Lower taxes
16. Abolish unemployment and poverty
17. An equal, justified, democratic, and progressive socialist society

The central proposition in the Barisan Sosialis’s campaign platform, namely, the pursuit of a united Malaya, of which Singapore was a part, continued to deny the legitimacy of both the Republic of Singapore and the Federation of Malaysia. When it came to concrete policies, the Barisan Sosialis platform

was toe-to-toe against the PAP-initiated measures aimed at forging a distinct Singapore identity. The Barisan Sosialis directly targeted the PAP's urban planning policies.

In this sense, the 1972 general elections of the Singapore parliament, the first that the Barisan Sosialis contested in a decade, became more of a referendum over the blueprints of nation building proposed by the two parties. The Barisan Sosialis contested for ten constituencies, yet no candidate won a seat. In terms of the votes, with a combined collected votes of 34,483, the Barisan Sosialis was ranked only fourth, behind not just the PAP, but also far behind other parties in the leftist camp, the Workers' Party and United National Front ("1972 Parliamentary General Election Results"). It was clear that after years of embracing Maoism and radical leftist practice, and the ruling party's social and urban constructions winning hearts and minds of Singapore nationals, the Barisan Sosialis was sidelined and marginalized in the parliamentary system where the acceptance and popularity of political parties were best represented in the votes received. Dr. Lee Siew Choh admitted that after years of struggle and inculcation of the concept of a Malayan nation by way of articles, declarations, newspapers, and other media widely referencing Mao, the fact of the separation of Malaya and Singapore had only become increasingly robust (*Party Information* 20 September 1969).

Following their defeat in the 1972 parliamentary elections, the Barisan Sosialis participated in the next two elections in 1976 and 1980, only to be crushed by the ruling party. In 1976, the Barisan Sosialis collected 25,411 votes, making up 3.1 percent of the total number of votes cast, which was worse than their 1972 elections results ("1976 Parliamentary General Election Results"). The 1980 elections witnessed an even worse result for the Barisan Sosialis; the second largest political party in Singapore which once achieved the best election results in Singapore that no other opposition party has achieved to this day, received only 16,488 votes, a 0.5 percent drop from the 1976 elections ("1980 Parliamentary General Election Results"). In the battle for hearts and minds, the Barisan Sosialis's vision of an alternative nation building for Singapore failed to generate Singaporeans' enthusiasm and identification.

During a rally for the 1980 general elections, Lee Kuan Yew, the Prime Minister, the biggest target in the narrative of the Maoist-inspired Barisan Sosialis, spoke to the masses: "The Chinese tried the Communist model, with their own modifications, and it failed! And they have admitted that it failed, and they're trying to pick up the same competitive spirit between workers, between different enterprises ... Dr. Lee Siew Choh and Mr. Jeyaratnam talk as if these things have never happened. They haven't learned! Deng

Xiaoping is a great man ... He fought a great revolution. He saw the product of that revolution turn sour. He was fortunate to live long enough and he had the courage to say 'No! We change course! Let's learn!' ("Lee Kuan Yew Talks About China and Deng")." Lee's remarks come in the context that a robust Singapore national identity was taking root while China started to launch de-Maoist reforms under Deng Xiaoping. Two years before Lee's 1980 rally speech, Deng visited Singapore. Histories after Deng's visit are known to many: Deng accepted Lee Kuan Yew's advice to terminate a Maoist practice of supporting communists in other countries, and the Singapore model occupied a prominent place in Deng's blueprint for China's reforms. Linking this historical turn with the decline of the Barisan Sosialis, it could be inferred that, since the late 1970s, China ceased to be the exporter of an ideology which may trigger any challenge to the nation building of Singapore. Instead, China took the developmental path of Singapore as its model for modernization (Kristof 1992; Ortmann and Thompson 2020). A Maoist vision did not win in Singapore, but Lee Kuan Yew's developmental path won disciples in China (Tiezza 2015; Matthew 2016; Zha 2015; Wong and Chin 2015). This reverse relationship marked not just the PAP's victory over radical leftists in realizing their blueprint of nation building, but also a solid Singaporean identity which eventually took root.

### **Conclusion: Public Housing, the True Anticommunist Marker of Singapore**

Historically, many countries around the world were involved in the quagmire of left-conservative confrontations in the aftermath of World War II generally, and in the 1960s particularly. Singapore was not immune. Radical leftist forces, represented by the Barisan Sosialis, turned to Maoism as a spiritual weapon. They theoretically embraced Maoism, opposed every social policy by the ruling elites, and presented an alternative blueprint of nation building for Singapore. It could be inferred that, if it succeeded, the Barisan Sosialis would have produced a different Singapore.

Yet, Singapore was exceptional in that it successfully defeated leftism without turning to violence and force. The Singapore government's response was by building its legitimacy. As I demonstrated in this chapter, one of the ways by which that Singapore government built its legitimacy was to undertake social and urban construction, the most notable of which was the promotion of home ownership through rolling out public housing projects. The logic of Singapore's conservative elites was that, by offering citizens a

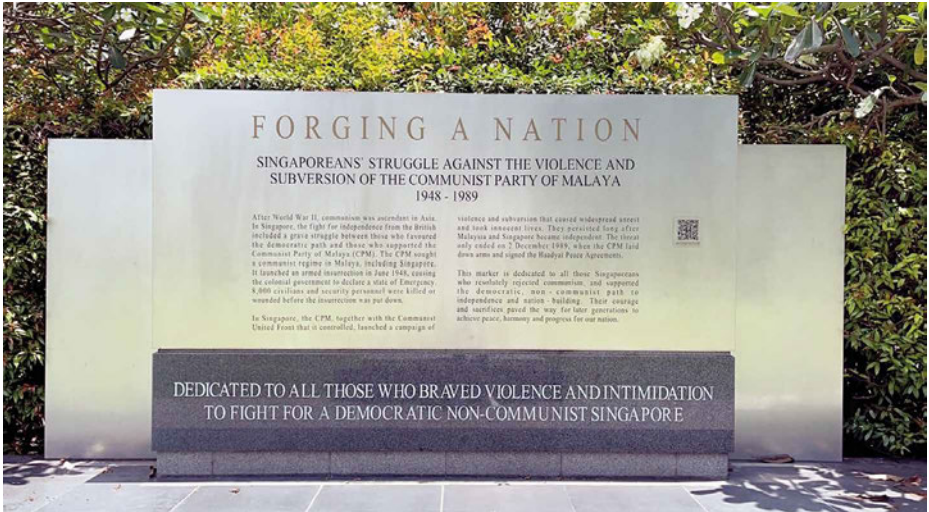


Figure 12.3. A marker established by the Singapore government dedicated to the nation's history of combating communism (photographed by the author, December 2019).

share in the nation, the sense of ownership could deter subversiveness in nationals instigated by radical leftism.

By examining the origins and rollout of Singapore's urban planning in the context of acute ideological struggles between radical leftism and conservatism, I conceptualized Singapore's urban planning as a Cold War landscape and as local responses to the global Cold War as well. In December 2014, the government of Singapore instituted a marker commemorating the struggles against communism (see fig. 12.3). Readers can infer that the Singapore government did not have to set up a separate marker or monument. The true marker commemorating the government's anticommunist efforts and indicating the eventual victory is no other than the high-rise public housing across the island.

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### **About the Author**

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# 13. Changi Airport and the Making of Nonaligned Singapore: Neoliberalism and Neutrality during the Cold War

*Ying-kit Chan*

**Abstract:** In this chapter, I examine the transformation of Singapore Changi Airport as a result of regional competition during the Cold War. Tracing Singapore's ambition to become a regional center of investments, tourism, and air traffic, I challenge the conventional understanding of the Cold War as a geopolitical conflict by examining the economic yet peaceful rivalry between two supposed allies in the anticommunist camp through the lens of airports. Ultimately, I suggest that Singapore Changi Airport, with the phallic architecture that is its control tower, was a subtle beacon of peace that helped resolve tensions and facilitate cross-cultural connections—even international cooperation—during the purportedly tense Cold War.

**Keywords:** banal nationalism, Changi Airport, Indigenization, neoliberalism, Singapore

## Introduction

Singapore was very much a product of Cold War geopolitics. Its former British colonizers, facing pressures to accommodate nationalistic demands from within Singapore and to prevent the island from becoming a communist city, decided to support the merger of Malaya, Singapore, Brunei, Sarawak, and North Borneo into an independent federation of Greater Malaysia. For the British government of the 1950s and 1960s, Greater Malaysia promised to neutralize Singapore's radical left-wing politics by anchoring such politics to an anticommunist state that would be led by its first prime minister,

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Lee Kuan Yew (1923–2015). As British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan (1894–1986) told Malayan Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman (1903–90) at a conference, “[If the] mighty United States could not deal with a communist Cuba in the Caribbean, it was difficult to see how the small Federation could cope with independent communist Singapore on its very doorstep” (Singh 2015, 32). For him, Greater Malaysia must incorporate as many territories as possible to control the ethnic Chinese population of Singapore, which was considered susceptible to Communist China’s propaganda and subversion. The federation, which split into Malaysia and Singapore in 1965, would be placed under the military protection of the Five Power Defence Arrangements between Australia, Britain, Malaysia, New Zealand, and Singapore (Tan 2017, 188–241; Chong 2020, 179–208). Coupled with the fact that Singapore became a crucial refueling base that offered aircraft and ship repair for the American military during the Vietnam War (1955–75), which lifted Singapore out of its economic downturn after secession from Malaysia and the withdrawal of British troops, the role played by the Cold War in Singapore’s economic and political development is obvious (Beng-Huat Chua 2017).

During the Cold War, Lee Kuan Yew’s People’s Action Party (PAP) government was willing to be cast as a frontline state in resisting the spread of communism. The alliance with the US-led Free World provided economic benefits in the form of developmental aid and investment capital. For the PAP government, fighting communism also offered a convenient excuse for political repression, and by labelling its critics as left-wing sympathizers it could subject the latter to detention without trial and lengthy jail sentences. Instead of condemning such repression, the United States and its key allies in the Free World supported authoritarian regimes, such as the PAP government, ideologically and materially, to contain communism. In Singapore, where British colonial administrators had already conducted anticommunist repression, the PAP government developed its rhetoric into a “life and death” struggle for the survival of the nascent city-state, which came to practice liberal economics but illiberal politics in the name of sustaining economic growth under able leadership (Beng-Huat Chua 2017, 47).

Neoliberalism, if understood as a set of principles based on neoclassical economics, posits that the most efficient allocation of resources is achieved by a natural and self-regulating market driven by its own internal law. During the Cold War, following proxy wars that engaged appeals to democracy in Korea in the 1950s and Vietnam in the 1960s and early 1970s, Keynesian political and economic forces began to unravel in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This development allowed the theorized coalescence between free markets and democracy to gain momentum as the supposed “freedom”

of neoliberalism became increasingly regarded as a salve for the global economic crisis (Springer 2015, 4). Since the early 1990s, manifested in such policies as outsourcing, privatization, fiscal austerity, and the retreat of the state, neoliberalism has helped extend market values to all spheres of political and social life, involving the enactment of governance within which markets are protected from politics. Hence, liberal economics and illiberal politics, while more unusual in mature democracies, can coexist in neoliberal Singapore, whose PAP government sought to eradicate collectivism and abject poverty by imposing strict economic discipline (Robison 2006, 67). Indeed, a central feature of neoliberalism is not the dismantling of the state, but its reorganization as an instrument insulated from the vested interests of distributional coalitions, and the state's role in a neoliberal economy is to regulate the market effectively. With its highly centralized structure of political control, the PAP government was able to organize a highly ordered operation for economic life and offer a sustainable framework for rapid economic growth and effective regulation of the neoliberal market in Singapore—at the price of civil liberties, individual freedoms, and political expression (Rodan 1989). For the PAP government, affluence and economic prosperity were the most effective bulwark against communism. By the same token, creating a neoliberal economy was the best way to eliminate national poverty and stop the global spread of communism.

Existing scholarship has divided the evolution of Southeast Asia's place during the Cold War and in the global system of nation-states into two key phases. From the 1950s to the end of the Vietnam War, the Cold War dictated an engagement that was almost entirely geopolitical in nature, characterized by the rise of powerful anticommunist governments, such as that of Singapore, within a broad, regional US-led alliance aimed at defeating communist insurgencies and revolutionary political movements. With the looming collapse of the Soviet Union during the 1980s, the Cold War waned, and the logic of engagement shifted to the sphere of economics as the major Western economies, notably that of the United States, liquidated their manufacturing bases to reorganize their ascendancy in a system of global financial markets. Southeast Asia, as this argument suggests, was thus drawn into a larger global project aimed at dismantling protected state-led capitalist structures by forcefully opening markets and deregulating financial regimes—neoliberal ideas became prominent only during the post-Cold War period (Robison 2006, 52).

In this chapter, I dispute the rigid periodization and suggest that Singapore's neoliberalism began much earlier—during the Cold War, soon after its independence from colonial rule. The British military withdrawal from Singapore, initially seen by the PAP government as an economic and

geostrategic crisis, helped transform the island into a high modernist state geared towards capitalist development and technocratic governance. The British transferred ownership of the military bases, many of which the PAP government converted to economic use. The PAP government then retrained the workers who had served at the bases through a massive program of technical and vocational education, eventually sending them to work at newly built factories and industrial estates. The British withdrawal was thus less a crisis than a catalyst for modernizing and neo-liberalizing the Singaporean economy, which benefited from the liquidation of the British bases (Loh 2011, 196–97). Singapore received a head start in the economic race with neighboring Southeast Asian nations because it embraced neoliberal values ahead of them during the Cold War.

In this chapter, I argue further that Singapore Changi Airport—which now ranks among the world’s best airports and stands both as a shorthand for Singapore’s renowned aviation facilities and management operations and as a signifier of Singapore’s unique brand of efficiency and reliability (Bok 2015, 2724)—is a symbol not only of neoliberal values but also of Singapore’s official foreign policy of neutrality and nonalignment during the Cold War. Although Changi Airport has not been privatized, as is the practice in most other neoliberal economies, it has shared traits associated with neoliberalism since its opening—a profusion of retail spaces, the outsourcing of service work to nonunionized workers, and the tightening of security and immigration procedures and ceaseless growth to satisfy demand, regardless of the consequences for the local environment or the planet (Vernon 2021, 125). While interest in airports as non-places and emblems of aeromobility and globalization by anthropologists and sociologists has grown in the scholarly literature, little work on their development history, let alone on that of Changi Airport, exists (Vernon 2021, 215). The long gestation of neoliberal practices at Changi and the increasing importance of freight traffic for the city-state’s economy suggest a need to reconsider the periodization of Singapore’s neoliberal origins. For the PAP government, the Cold War was a long interlude in decolonization and the rediscovery of a future and peacefully reconciled pan-Asian region. This helps explain why modern Singapore, as is the case across much of Asia, is simultaneously nationalistic in foreign policy and yet embraces regionalism, if not globalism, in economics. Changi Airport thus presents a case of “indigenizing the Cold War” beyond ideological and political confines and standard narratives of the struggle for global dominance between the Soviet Union and the United States (Chong 2020, 204). The PAP government sought to secure and enlarge Singapore’s legitimacy as a nation-state by promoting it as an oasis for all great powers and major

economies, regardless of their ideology and differences, and Changi Airport constituted a part of this endeavor (Chong 2020, 201).

The Cold War might have begun in Europe and North America, but its deepest reverberations were felt in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, where nearly every community, nation or society had to choose sides that would define their economies and regimes (Westad 2017). Like small nations elsewhere in the world, such as Sweden and Switzerland, Singapore unilaterally declared its policy of neutrality and nonalignment and refrained from overt military connections with either the Soviet Union or the United States (Ganser 2005, 553–80; Nilsson 2009, 287–307). Even so, the PAP government collaborated extensively with Britain and the United States during the Cold War. Given Singapore's role as host to Britain's most important air and naval installations in Asia, vital to the US-led Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), the Eisenhower administration launched psychological warfare operations in Singapore, injecting cultural products such as popular literature and news coverage of American scientific research to endear the PAP government and the Singaporean public to its free-market economy and geostrategic interests in the Asia-Pacific region.

Although Lee Kuan Yew often criticized American policies, he remained an ardent supporter of US intervention in Indochina. While adhering to a policy of nonalignment, he offered Singapore as a rest and recreation haven to soldiers fighting in Vietnam. Although he deplored the excesses of American society, he lauded its superiority in the use of computers and information technology. Lee Kuan Yew, the PAP government, and the Singaporean public are best described as being openly neutral but harboring a positive opinion of American power and scientific achievements. In retrospect, the United States had created a sympathetic, though not overtly aligned, constituency in Singapore that was prepared to lend quiet support to its policies (Long 2008, 929). Both Singapore and the United States recognized that a formal alliance or any overt political alignment during the Cold War might not further their advanced interests, given that Singapore had a substantial ethnic Chinese population (it still has) with cultural and ethnic affiliations with communist China. Singapore thus adopted a nonaligned approach. At times, Singapore drew close to the United States, especially when Britain first announced its intention to withdraw troops from Malaysia and Singapore and after the United States ceased its involvement in the Vietnam War. On most other occasions, regarding the United States as a peacetime partner that could help it achieve its immediate goals of security, nation-building, and socioeconomic development, Singapore preferred to emphasize its neutrality and kept the latter at a distance. During the Cold War, then,

Singapore's relationship with the United States was dictated by and premised upon common strategic interests (Chua 2017, 7–8).

In the end, the anticommunist arc, of which Singapore was a part, offered the United States an “international empire” in Asia, which replaced formal colonialism and produced a new order through the coordination of “legitimate” nation-states (Ngoei 2019, 6). In 1967, five anticommunist states, including Singapore, founded the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which claimed to be nonaligned but had fully supported the US military intervention in Vietnam (Ngoei 2019, 10). Singapore thrived as a war economy during the Vietnam War. In the year during which ASEAN was founded, as much as 15 percent of Singapore's national income was derived from US military procurements for Vietnam, and Singapore served as a regional petroleum-refining center that proved crucial to the American war machine (Ngoei 2017).

Given such a historical context, in this chapter I examine how Singapore sought to downplay or disguise its alignment with the US-led Free World through Changi Airport, which professed and highlighted its official policy of neutrality while contributing to the development of a neoliberal economy. Relying on sources such as local and foreign newspapers, parliamentary debates and reports, and academic exercises conducted by the National University of Singapore, I first sketch a brief history of airports in Singapore. In the second section, I discuss the transnational construction of Changi Airport, which came into being because of both Indigenous agency and external stimuli. In the third section, I explore the friendly and neoliberal competition within the world of capitalist nations between Changi Airport and its strongest rival, Thailand's Don Mueang Airport, to become the premier regional hub for commercial flights. Prior to the conclusion, I examine how Changi Airport, which by the end of the Cold War had developed from a regional hub into a world-class facility, became a symbol of national pride and a beacon of global peace—a global structure serving local interests. Rather than merely projecting an image of neutrality and nonalignment, Changi Airport exceeded the expectations of its builders, patrons, and sponsors and transformed into a site of nationalistic feelings among Singaporeans, helping to fuse the nation together in a world polarized by ideology and political partisanship.

### **Airports in Singapore: A Brief History**

Operations at Changi Airport did not begin with a blank slate; the site was a trans-local product of earlier aviation landscapes and historical travels

within and outside Singapore (Bok 2015, 2725). Like elsewhere in the world, Singapore saw drastic changes in the evolution of its airports. Its pioneer airports—Seletar, Kallang, and Paya Lebar—were simple structures consisting of a flat, well-drained field free of obstacles, with barn-like hangars for servicing grounded aircraft and terminals to shelter waiting air passengers. The early air terminals were modest buildings, comprising a small office and a waiting room topped by a glassed-in control tower sprouting a windsock, weather equipment and a lighted beacon (Breihan 2008, 850).

The growth of civil aviation in Singapore can be traced to 1911, with the first demonstration flight of an airplane by French pilot Joseph Christiaens. Despite the fanfare and media sensation, British colonial officials were disinclined to invest in building an airport on Singapore, given that air cargo and travel were uncommon during that period. However, in response to Japan's increasing air and naval power in the 1920s, the British began planning for an airfield and seaplane base to improve their strategic position in the region (Goh 2012, 12–13). After assessing that Singapore's north coast was guarded by the Malayan jungle and that the south was exposed to attacks from the sea, the British decided to build Singapore's first airport in the northeastern part of the island in Seletar (Taylor 2002, 16–18). Completed in 1928, Seletar Airbase had a simple seaplane slipway that served both military and civilian aircraft. Commentators and observers were unimpressed, however, remarking that the facilities at Seletar were inadequate compared to the aerodrome in Bangkok (Cheong 2020, 21). They also criticized the British for not building a longer runway to accommodate land planes that could carry bigger and heavier loads (Cheong 2020, 21). Seletar Airbase also lacked a suitable landing ground for commercial planes due to its soft soil conditions, and it was located far from the colony's seaport and business center. With Singapore's status as a preferred trading port along the route between China and India, the growth in commerce meant that Singapore had to either construct adequate aviation facilities or risk losing out on such growth altogether, providing another example of how Singapore's economic success depended on wider global economic and technological trends and on its ability to introduce new technology, be it bestowed or acquired, for sustenance and further development (Koh 2019, 28). By the 1930s, the use of airplanes for transporting both mail and passengers had experienced tremendous growth. In 1934, Seletar received 896 passengers and 21,149 pounds of mail; merely two years later, the number had risen to 2,095 passengers and 52,657 pounds of mail (Goh 2012, 28). The increasingly larger planes necessitated a longer runway and demanded extensions of Seletar if it were to continue its operations. A better-equipped airport

dedicated to commercial use and located closer to the port and city center ultimately gave rise to the construction of Kallang Airport on the Kallang Basin, which broke ground in 1931 and was officially opened in 1937. That Kallang Airport was situated on the Kallang Basin along the Kallang River meant that it could accommodate not only land but also marine aircraft. At the time, seaplanes remained a common mode of flying, and Kallang Airport offered a convenient landing location. Sir Cecil Clementi (1875–1947), then the governor and commander-in-chief of the Straits Settlements (1930–34), expected Singapore to become a larger and more important airfield and nodal point for air services in the future, as planes would require a layover for long flights (Koh 2019, 31). Unlike his predecessors, he took a personal interest in selecting the site for Kallang Airport and anticipated the rise of air traffic to Singapore and across Asia in general. To build Kallang Airport, the Kallang Basin was reclaimed, and the many Malay and Chinese squatters there were evicted. Clementi and colonial engineers devoted much attention to the design of the terminal building, storm water precautions, and the siting of the hangars. They had high hopes for Kallang Airport, with the local newspaper *The Straits Times* reporting that “[only after its opening will] the Singapore public become fully conscious of the destiny of this city as a junction of Eastern airways” (“Kallang Dreams” 1935).

In June 1937, Clementi’s successor, Sir Shenton Thomas (1879–1962), officiated at the opening of Kallang Airport, then described by the local press as one of the world’s finest airports. However, the outbreak of war in Europe in September 1939 and in Asia in December 1941 halted air traffic in Singapore, where military concerns took precedence as the colony prepared for war (Koh 2019, 35). In February 1942, the British surrendered Singapore to invading Japanese forces, and the island’s airports helped launch the latter’s air attacks on other Southeast Asian colonies. Kallang was thus subject to Allied air raids and aerial bombing, and years of neglect under Japanese occupation resulted in an airport with an unreliable electrical supply, grimy dormitories for airmen, and a severely damaged runway (Goh 2012, 40–41).

During the war, the Japanese built an airfield in Changi with the labor of inmates and prisoners of war at the nearby Changi Prison, and the airfield became a Royal Air Force station under the returning British military authorities (Goh 2012, 48). In 1946, colonial Singapore’s Department of Civil Aviation requested funds to renovate Kallang Airport and build a second runway there. But despite plans to upgrade the airport, Kallang was structurally constrained by its soil conditions—it could not receive planes weighing more than 30,000 pounds in gross weight (“Civil Air Chief Tells Tribune” 1946). Heavier aircraft had to be diverted to the airbases in Changi

and Tengah (Goh 2012, 50). The colonial government considered expanding Kallang but concluded that it lacked the capacity for expansion (Hutton 1981, 25–27). By then, the economic viability of Singapore had become dependent on continued growth in air traffic volume, which required the abandonment of Kallang Airport and triggered the search for a site for Singapore's new airport (Koh 2019, 35).

In 1950, the colonial government surveyed Singapore and announced Paya Lebar as the chosen location. If Kallang were expanded, it would intrude into the densely populated Geylang area, whereas Paya Lebar had tracts of vacant land for building longer runways to cater to the increased traffic volume ("Kallang Dreams" 1935). The Second World War had introduced long runways that were required to operate heavy aircraft, such as long-distance bombers, which led to the phasing out of seaplanes and short runways; Paya Lebar thus did not require access to the sea to accommodate marine aircraft (Koh 2019, 36–37). In 1955, Paya Lebar Airport officially opened. With the ever-increasing rise in traffic volume, the government continued to invest in Paya Lebar Airport, installing surveillance radar equipment and a semiautomatic tape relay that amplified its stature as a modern and progressive airport (Goh 2012, 72–73).

In 1964, a new passenger terminal was opened. However, even though many improvements were made to Paya Lebar Airport, the rise in traffic volume was unexpected. By the end of 1965, passenger traffic had increased by 16 percent to 705,483, with sixteen airlines maintaining scheduled flights to Paya Lebar Airport, suggesting again that the development of aviation technology was outstripping the capacity of its airports (Koh 2019, 40). As the bulkier Boeing 747s were introduced into the aviation market, the limited capacity of Paya Lebar Airport was revealed, and the PAP government, which assumed power after 1959, announced in 1970 its intention to extend the existing runway and build an additional one for the airport (*Singapore Parliamentary Report* 1970). However, shortly after the announcement was made, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew informed residents in the Paya Lebar area that the expansion plans ongoing at the airport were not intended for the long term; they were a stopgap measure while the government scouted for another location to build Singapore's next international airport.

Lee Kuan Yew felt the need to pacify the residents because the expansion works were causing noise pollution and disrupted telephone calls and television programs; the larger airplanes hovering over the housing estate were also increasingly noisier and more frequent, lowering the living standards of the residents ("Airport Area Jet Noise" 1970). The Singapore Planning and Urban Research Group (SPUR), an association formed by

architects and urban planners, argued that funds being channeled to the expansion of Paya Lebar Airport should be redirected to construct a new airport in the Changi area. In 1971, when most British troops had withdrawn from Singapore, the ministry of communications revealed that it was conducting feasibility studies on building a second runway at Changi in anticipation of the British handover of Changi Airbase (*Singapore Parliamentary Report* 1971). However, the government remained undecided about whether to build a new airport at Changi, and parliamentarians continued to debate whether the airfield should be used for civilian use or military purposes (*Singapore Parliamentary Report* 1972). In one such debate, it was revealed that the ministry of defense initially planned to retain Changi Airfield as an airbase. The ministry of communications also reported that Paya Lebar Airport had not reached its maximum capacity, suggesting again that the government was reluctant to abandon Paya Lebar Airport in favor of building a new airport in Changi (“Airport Still Capable of Bigger Load” 1972).

### **Transnational Impetuses for Building Changi Airport**

Along with advances in aviation technology from the West, economic and geopolitical developments outside Singapore played a key role in the evolution of its airports; in many ways, the construction of Changi Airport was transnational. It was global oil prices that first set the PAP government’s mind on building a new airport in the Changi area. In 1973, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which was dominated by Arab nations, imposed an embargo by reducing oil production and banning petroleum exports to the United States and other countries that had supported Israel in its conflict with the Arab world. Oil prices soared, resulting in a global recession that raised flying costs and severely curtailed air travel. The crisis reduced air traffic and delayed the PAP government’s need for a second runway at Paya Lebar Airport, allowing officials to reconsider building an airport in Changi instead. The plan to build Changi appeared more feasible now that Paya Lebar Airport could handle the reduced air traffic and would not require money being spent on it as a stopgap measure for providing a second runway. In 1975, the Prime Minister’s Office confirmed that the government would build a new airport in Changi instead of expanding Paya Lebar Airport. The choice to construct an airport in Changi would evict fewer families, as the new flight path in Singapore would be over the sea, hence reducing

noise pollution to nearby residents. Based on previous experiences, Changi was chosen so as not to repeat the mistake of underestimating the growth in air traffic volume: the new airport could be expanded to accommodate any future developments in aviation technology because the government could reclaim more land to make expansion possible (Koh 2019, 45–47).

After announcing its plans to build Changi Airport, the government assured the nation that the construction would affect “the least number of people in terms of land acquisition, resettlement, and noise pollution” (“\$1b to Make Changi the Second Airport” 1975). However, with the government implementing its developmental plans by acquiring 168.8 acres of land, as well as Singaporeans’ favorite picnic locality, Changi Beach, the environmental and human costs of building Changi Airport proved immense. The PAP government, like the governments of other fast-developing economies in postcolonial nations, had, in the name of progress, used environmental transformation as a means of expanding and legitimating its authority (Powell 2021, 638). The government accomplished the feat of nation-building and constructing a new airport through technological aid and transfer from abroad. In 1976, the Port of Singapore Authority (PSA), charged with helping build the airport, entered into a joint venture with a Japanese firm, which was awarded the contract for land reclamation. A task force of 900 men was deployed for the land reclamation project, which added 745 hectares to the shoreline within thirty-seven months (“Biggest Land Reclamation Contract in S.-E. Asia” 1976). The selection of a Japanese firm to help reclaim land for the construction of Changi Airport should not be surprising. Although Singapore was subject to brutal Japanese rule from 1942 to 1945, Lee Kuan Yew rejected local appeals to extract heavy war reparations from Japan, seeking to foster cordial relations with the country and obtain Japanese investments in the Singaporean economy (Hack and Blackburn 2012, 162–64).

The transnational building of Changi Airport also came in the form of ideas and inspiration. Lee Kuan Yew finally decided to throw in his lot with Changi Airport after having flown across Boston’s Logan Airport, which was a fringe water airport that allowed for future expansion. He observed that Logan Airport did not pose problems, such as height restrictions, mass evictions, and noise pollution, and land could be reclaimed from the sea for expansion (Liew 2008, 197). Throughout the 1970s, architects, engineers, and civil aviation officers from the Public Works Department undertook study tours of major American and European airports to complete their master plan for Changi Airport. The PAP government decided to model

Changi Airport after the Netherlands's Schiphol Airport, whose concept of a central terminal suited Singapore's objective of functioning as a transit hub. It engaged the same Dutch consultant to collaborate in designing Changi Airport, "setting in motion the embodied travels of knowledge from Amsterdam to Singapore that were appropriated for and materialized in the built form of Changi" (Bok 2015, 2731). In 1981, Changi Airport was opened for operations. Its first runway was an extension of the British-built military runway from Changi Airbase, and Lee Kuan Yew took a personal interest in the new airport by insisting that trees be planted along the highway leading to it (Liew 2008, 210). The concept of surrounding an airport with trees within a garden city was one of the very few Indigenous ideas.

However, the managers of Changi Airport did not merely mimic other airports; they chose to emphasize Changi's soft infrastructure of service skills and passenger-centered philosophy, seeking to distinguish Changi from other airports. This early focus on service efficiency was congruent with Singapore's neoliberal productivity campaigns organized during economic restructuring during the 1980s (Bok 2015, 2731–32). The emphasis on human capital, tactically deployed and institutionally amplified, helped localize foreign models and reproduce the Changi model, a place-particular quality not easily replicated by aspirants elsewhere (Bok 2015, 2732). Perhaps more importantly, the aviation authorities endeavored to maintain Changi's role in strategically situating Singapore at the crossroads of the world's major airlines, linking the capitalist and communist worlds, and its extensive intra-Asian flight connections made Singapore an ideal springboard for a prospering region. True to its neoliberal slant, integrated hotels and meeting rooms ensured strong connectivity with departure gates and interterminal transfers, and such spaces of hypermobility connoted efficiency, seamlessness and speed, enhancing Singapore's attractiveness as a business destination (Bok 2015, 2732). The need to satisfy the travel-unrelated demands of increasingly discerning air passengers pointed to Singapore's attempts to seize opportunities in the burgeoning regional tourism market, and Changi Airport began to win accolades. The tipping point came in 1988 when Changi overtook Schiphol, then the top-ranking airport, in an international poll conducted by *Business Traveller*. Within the Free World, Changi's triumph helped prompt a reassessment of top airports and a subsequent reorientation of spatial imaginations, as Changi became known as the latest airport to which other airports should aspire (Bok 2015, 2733). The transnational building of Changi Airport was thus complete, with the airport neo-liberalizing other aspiring airports through its example and being more global than those that had inspired its success.

## Changi versus Don Mueang: Competition within the Free World

During the 1980s, in the first decade of Changi Airport's operations and the final decade of the Cold War, Singapore had a *de facto* rivalry with Thailand, an ally within the Free World, in attracting air traffic to its airport. At the time, Thailand had just completed the expansion and redevelopment of its Don Mueang Airport, which was designed to secure Thailand's position as an important economic center at the crossroads of mainland Southeast Asia. While a detailed history is beyond the scope of this chapter, in sum, the Singapore-Thailand airport rivalry originated at sea, that is, with the American, British, French, Japanese, and Chinese expressing interest in constructing a canal across the Isthmus of Kra in southern Thailand, which would allow ships to bypass Singapore enroute from the Straits of Malacca to the South China Sea. As late as the 1980s, Lee Kuan Yew and other senior statesmen of Singapore remained disturbed by reports or rumors of foreign intent to build the Kra canal (Dobbs 2016, 165–86). As both Singapore and Thailand were located at the center of trading routes between Asia and Europe, their rivalry for economic relevance extended to the air, with Changi and Don Mueang contending to become a key collection and distribution center of goods and people for Southeast Asia, if not the world, towards the end of the Cold War. Underlying this competition was the immense growth potential in air traffic predicted for the Asia-Pacific region at the time, and the stakes involved were high, with major economic and political implications for both Singapore and Thailand. Achieving the status of a regional aviation hub not only meant more airlines, more flights, and more visitors, it also gave the airlines reciprocal rights to fly to other countries. A busy airport would generate multiplier effects in the country's economy. More hotels, restaurants and other facilities would raise employment and contribute to a more favorable balance of payments, and more flight frequencies to more cities in the world would attract foreign investments and promote the country as a modern business, communication and financial center (Lim 1990, 70–72). It is hardly an overstatement to say that without Changi Airport, Singapore would not have become a global city (Chan 2013, 307–25).

In trying to outrace its regional competitors, Singapore certainly had cause for concern. The redevelopment of Bangkok's Don Mueang Airport, which lasted from 1980 to 1988, was one of the most complex and substantial civil aviation projects ever undertaken in Asia (Lim 1990, 72). Completed at a cost of five billion baht (US\$200 million), the project involved building a second runway, a new cargo terminal, a domestic passenger terminal seven times the size of the old terminal and an international passenger terminal

with a peak-hour capacity of almost 12,000 passengers—four times larger than the old terminal. In the first year of completion, the redeveloped Don Mueang Airport received 9,892 passengers, which rose 26 percent on the 1987 level and allowed Bangkok to rival Singapore, which received 12,570 passengers that year, as the major regional air hub (Lim 1990, 72–73). The Thai government launched an aggressive advertising campaign to promote Thailand as a tourist destination. Bangkok already had the advantage of being nearer than Singapore to Europe, East Asia, and North America, making it one of the most heavily utilized air nodes in the region (Lim 1990, 73). By 1988, due to strong export demands and a surge in tourist dollars, the Thai economy had recorded one of the highest growth performances in Southeast Asia. As more foreign companies set up offices in Bangkok and as the domestic demand for capital goods grew, Don Mueang Airport became responsible for the sharp increase in passenger, and, especially, cargo traffic. The higher per capita income among Thais that accompanied Thailand's economic growth also generated a demand for air travel (Lim 1990, 76). Thailand's impressive growth rates and vast potential for further development led to expert speculation that it would become the fifth tiger economy of Asia after Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan (Muscat 1994).

Despite the challenge posed by Thailand, Singapore held on to the title of leading aviation center, not just within ASEAN but also the whole of Asia. By 1989, Changi Airport was linked to twenty-one cities, while Don Mueang was connected to only six ASEAN cities. Singapore remained the preferred layover location for Southeast Asian passengers travelling to Australia and Europe, serving as the entry point to the region for European travelers. The recipe for Changi Airport's success was fine coordination between the private and public sectors in Singapore, whose government was more than capable of identifying and exploiting new niches than its colonial predecessor and other governments in Southeast Asia. For example, during the 1970s, the PAP government anticipated the growing global popularity of air freight due to its safety and speed. Singapore then took the lead in establishing itself as an air cargo trans-shipment center, developing its potential well ahead of other countries. The PAP government's bold yet calculated decision to relocate the airport from Paya Lebar to Changi was another example of how it sought to develop the Singaporean economy at all costs, be they ecological or human.

Trying to counter Thailand's economic threat, Singapore decided to build a third passenger terminal to make up for its lack of comparative advantage—Thailand boasted a much larger territory that had immense

potential for tourism (Lim 1990, 77–81). By providing value-added services geared towards passenger comfort and convenience, Changi Airport compensated for the inadequacies of Singapore and helped the country attract and retain foreign investments in the neoliberal age of popularized air travel, which had made capital, goods, and people highly mobile and hence easy to lose. Although Singapore had defied a key tenet of neoliberalism—that governmentality should be limited to give free rein to market forces—the PAP government had innovatively changed the face of neoliberalism and exposed it to be a “malleable technology of governing by reengineering populations and spaces,” through which Changi Airport prospered under a counterintuitively authoritarian regime that resisted the logic and spirit of neoliberalism and did not privatize its airport (Ong 2006, 12). The PAP government recognized that aeromobility was deeply intertwined with the capitalist world system in terms of linking multinational corporations in distribution and production activities and promoting consumption (Baer 2020, 164). Changi Airport triumphed over Don Mueang Airport because it had become a larger and more appealing commercial center, shopping mall, and “cathedral of consumption” in the age of neoliberalism (Baer 2020, 45).

### **Banal Nationalism during the Global Cold War**

Toward the end of the Cold War, Changi Airport became not only regional but also global, handling international flights and winning international accolades from around the world. Nevertheless, it was a highly local structure, visible to Singaporeans and encountered in their everyday lives. Geographers Lily Kong and Brenda S. A. Yeoh have examined the power relations that contest the specificities of the Singaporean nation and how they are negotiated through elements of space and the urban landscape, including the practices of everyday life (Kong and Yeoh 2003, 15). One such space, which Kong and Yeoh have omitted from their illuminating study, is Changi Airport, which reflects the landscape and practice of banal nationalism in Cold War Singapore.

Introduced and popularized by social psychologist Michael Billig, banal nationalism refers to the nation as a social construct and covers the “ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced. ... These habits are not removed from everyday life. ... Daily, the nation is indicated, or ‘flagged,’ in the lives of its citizenry” (Billig 2010, 5). As Singapore’s rapid economic growth made it increasingly “established,” nationalism, while not frequently and overtly expressed, had become an

endemic condition in the country. The PAP government, while not bearing a grudge towards Japan for its occupation of colonial Singapore, began in 1984 to commemorate the colony's fall every year on 15 February, on what it called Civil Defence Day. Policymakers took the opportunity to emphasize Singapore's vulnerability as a nation, hoping to nurture nationalism and educate the public about the need for civil defense and military capabilities. They fostered a siege mentality among Singaporeans, who were instructed to think that war could be economic rather than military, given the small size and limited resources of Singapore (Koga 2021, 133–51). They offered fertile ground for banal nationalism to grow because “preparation must have been routinely accomplished to make such readiness possible” (Billig 2010, 5). In other less obvious yet significant ways, Singaporeans were reminded daily of their place in a world of nations, but “this reminding is so familiar, so continual, that it is not consciously registered as reminding” (Billig 2010, 6). Changi Airport presented one such metonymic image of banal nationalism that subtly suggested that Singapore was its own nation rather than a mere pawn of American interests.

Shaped like a scepter, Changi Airport's control tower was recognized by most Singaporeans as symbolizing national identity and became a synecdoche for the airport. Its replication across various media and objects reinforced the image of Changi in Singaporeans; each time they saw the tower, they were reminded of Changi and its positive attributes and memories. As a material landmark, Changi Airport's effect on Singaporeans was discursive, becoming a symbol with shared meanings. With its positive qualities distilled into the tower as an icon as generalized to the nation, Changi Airport invited Singaporeans to identify it with feelings of home and belonging (Woon 2015, 54). Through objects imprinted with its likeness, such as postcards, stamps, and textbooks, the control tower ubiquitously permeated the daily lives of Singaporeans (Woon 2015, 56). These objects became travelling landscape objects: graphic representations serving as media to shape geographical imaginations and symbolize national identity. Thus, Changi Airport extended beyond its spatial confines to become imbued into circulating objects in everyday life, reflecting another form of banal nationalism (Woon 2015, 59). Its iconic control tower, embedded in banknotes, coins, and stamps, was part of an iconography designed to bolster national identity and construct a sense of collective memory and tradition (Penrose and Cumming 2011, 822). Through the iconography of supposedly mundane objects, Changi Airport reified the imagined community of Singapore. Changi was construed as economically crucial, featuring Singapore's “values,” such as pragmatism and the relentless pursuit of excellence (Woon 2015, 60). Changi Airport,

as a globalized space of aeromobility and hypermobility, generated strong feelings of national identification among both well-travelled and locally rooted Singaporeans (Woon 2015, 97).

Singapore's search for order, stability, economic prosperity, and national identity occurred in the dangerous world of the Cold War, given that the threat of communism and proxy wars outside the two superpowers had loomed large in the minds of its political leaders. Although it had become clear that the United States and the capitalist camp it led were winning the Cold War on the economic and material front through a superior mode of domestic consumption and industrial production (Chan 2020, 414–34), the PAP government remained vigilant and sensitive to global shifts of ideology, preferring to foster a national identity that was based on multiracialism and economic pursuit—the different races in Singapore did not have a shared history, but they would share a vision and the future of a prosperous Singapore. For many observers and frequent air travelers, Singapore appeared to adopt a pragmatic and pacifist national identity, developing norms of commercial or economic exchange with most countries in the world. However, as a close security ally of the United States, Singapore developed its military power with one of the highest budgets in Asia, continuing to invest in its air force and the airbases inherited from the British while maintaining Changi Airport's status as one of the world's finest airports and a symbol of national pride (Huxley 2000). While this reflected an intrinsic tension in Singapore's Cold War identity formation, the pragmatic PAP government proved flexible in its approach to global politics, seeking to make Singapore prosperous in peacetime and yet ready for war.

## Conclusion

After the Cold War ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union and its Eastern European client states, the PAP government continued to attract more foreign investments for Singapore and affix it even more securely to neoliberalism or global capitalism. Prior to the perceptible rise of China, Singapore in the 1990s could align itself more openly with American interests in the Asia-Pacific region under the US-dominated financial system. Changi Airport, a product of the Asian economic boom during the 1980s, was instrumental to Singapore's transformation from Third World to first and has remained a key marker of its economic miracle (Lee 2000). Singapore's success as a nation rested on its pragmatism and astute assessment of international relations, an indicator of which was its cooperation with the

Soviet Union in trade and economic matters in forming joint ventures. This remained a formula for its engagement with a China that opened up during the 1990s, which was communist in name but capitalist in practice (Hong 2006, 65–70; Pereira 2003). In Singapore's transformation, Changi Airport, besides enabling and facilitating the flow of goods and people for economic development, possessed the symbolic function of displaying the country's alleged neutrality and nonpartisanship in a world divided by sheer ideology and conflicting interests between the Soviet Union and the United States during the Cold War. By allowing a resource-poor, otherwise insignificant nation to punch above its weight and survive in the tussle between the superpowers, Changi Airport garnered national pride and, hence, national identity from Singaporeans, who celebrated it as a "dear" and "sacred" space on their country's fiftieth anniversary of independence in 2015 (Woon 2015, 76). A global product of the Cold War had become a highly revered national symbol.

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