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# From Periphery to Center to Periphery: Chinese Studies in Southeast Asia, 1960-2000

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**Lee Cheuk-Yin** is Professor of Chinese Studies, National University of Singapore. His research focuses are history of late imperial China, Chinese intellectual history and East Asian civilizations, Chinese religions and business ethics, and China's Belt & Road Initiatives. In recent years he also started a new research on Chinese medical tradition on health and well-being. He has authored 8 books, edited 25 monographs, and published more than 60 journal articles and 80 book chapters on Chinese studies. His authored books include *The Centre and the Periphery: Transmission and Interaction of East Asian Civilizations* (2015), *A Critical Biography of Qiu Jun* (2004, 2011), *Confucian Tradition and Intellectual Changes* (2003), *Doing Business with China* (1997), *Taoism: Outlines of a Chinese Religious Tradition* (1994). He is the chief editor of four influential book series: *Emotions and the State of Mind in East Asia* (Leiden: Brill), *Overseas China Studies* (China: Guangxi Normal University Press), *Monograph Series on Sinology* (Singapore: NUS), *Monography Series on Southeast Asian Chinese* (Singapore: NUS).

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*From Periphery to Center to Periphery:  
Chinese Studies in Southeast Asia, 1960-2000*

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*Tong Chee Kiong  
Lee Cheuk Yin*

**Abstract:**

This paper examines the contribution of overseas scholars to Chinese studies. Given that eighty percent of the Chinese diaspora are located in Southeast Asia, it pays particular attention to social science scholarship in the region. The work of scholars in religion and ethnicity are highlighted. The authors argue that the rise of China in the last thirty years has led to a shift of research originating from the mainland. However, they suggest that China will not become the centre of scholarship on the Chinese; instead there will be multiple centres developing in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Southeast Asia.

**Keywords:** Chinese Studies, China, Diaspora, Southeast Asia, Religion, Ethnicity

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# *From Periphery to Center to Periphery: Chinese Studies in Southeast Asia, 1960-2000*

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*Tong Chee Kiong  
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## **Introduction**

It is estimated that there are 18 to 20 million ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia today. In the context of the Chinese diaspora, this constitutes 80 to 85% of Chinese found outside China. Any assessment of the contribution of Chinese studies outside of China will have to take into account the Chinese in Southeast Asia. The title of this paper is “From periphery to center to periphery.” In 1991, Tu Wei-ming wrote an important paper, “Cultural China: The Periphery as the Center.” The thrust of his argument is that due to years of inertia and inefficiency, China can no longer claim to possess the cultural core; instead it is the periphery that will set the agenda for cultural China. To quote Tu (1991: 27), “Although realistically, those who are on the periphery (the second and third symbolic universes plus Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore) are seemingly helpless in affecting any fundamental transformation of China proper, the center no longer has the ability, insight, or legitimate authority to dictate the agenda for cultural China. On the contrary, the transformative potential of the periphery is so great that it seems inevitable that it will significantly shape the intellectual discourse on cultural China for years to come.”

While China is one of the longest continuous civilizations in human history and had been the center for Chinese studies; with the Communist takeover of 1949, the center for Chinese studies shifted out of China, and moved to Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Southeast Asia.<sup>1</sup> However, with the opening up China starting in the 1970s, and accelerating in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and its rise economically, politically, militarily, and most importantly, culturally, it may be

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<sup>1</sup> Other than Southeast Asia, the major centers for the study of the Chinese were in Taiwan and Hong Kong. However, the focus will be on Southeast Asian Chinese Studies, with passing references to research conducted in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Of course, the other major centers for Chinese studies also shifted to the United States, particularly in Yale, Harvard, and to a degree, the west coast universities. Again, while references will be made to them, the focus will be on Southeast Asian research.



argued that Chinese studies is shifting inexorably back to the mainland. However, as demonstrated in the paper, there will be a process of de-centering, and the future of Chinese Studies will be multi-centered. This paper will review the literature on the state of Chinese studies overseas, particularly in Southeast Asia. While the paper will review some of the advances made in humanities research, including history, philosophy, language and literature, the greater portion of this paper will be devoted to social sciences research, particularly by anthropologists and sociologists.

## **Humanities**

The Communist takeover in 1949 resulted in the closing of China to overseas scholars. Within China, the destructive influences of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution also meant that intellectual discourse within China, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, was largely curtailed. In Southeast Asia, the founding of the Department of Chinese Studies at the University of Singapore in 1953, and the inauguration of Nanyang University in 1955, provided the opportunity for the development of Chinese Studies outside China. These two institutions were able to draw a large number of international scholars, including researchers from Taiwan and Hong Kong. The subsequent division of the University of Malaya at the independence of Singapore in 1965 led to the setting up of two universities, the University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur and its Department of Chinese Studies under the leadership of Professor Cheng Tak-kun 鄭德坤, and the University of Singapore, with the Department under the leadership of Prof. Lim Chee Then 林徐典.<sup>2</sup> In fact, it can be suggested that for Southeast Asia, these are the only two major centers for Chinese Studies; in the other Southeast Asian countries, Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand, because of historical, domestic, political and environmental conditions, Chinese studies was not really encouraged.

The inaugural head of the Department of Chinese Studies of the University of Singapore was Professor Ho Kong Chong 賀光中 from the University of Hong Kong. Eminent scholars who had taught in the Department include Qian Mu 錢穆, Lin Yin 林尹, Cheng Kuang-yu 程光裕, Kung Tao Yun 龔道運, and Lim Chee Then. In 1955, Nanyang University's Department of Chinese recruited many well-known scholars from Taiwan, such as Ho Ping-ti 何炳棣,

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<sup>2</sup> While the two departments were split in 1965, it should be noted that there is still close research collaboration between the two institutions, including joint research projects and joint conferences.

Wang Shu-min 王叔岷, Lee Hsiao-ting 李孝定, Hu Chu-sheng 胡楚生 and Kao Ming 高明. When the two universities merged in 1980, the first Head of Department of Chinese Studies of the National University of Singapore was Professor Wang Shu-min from the Nanyang University.<sup>3</sup>

These Departments may be described as a traditional or “classical” center for Chinese studies. In the early years, the four main foci of teaching and research were Chinese philosophy, Chinese literature, Chinese history, and Chinese in Southeast Asia. While the focus of research in these Departments has expanded over the years to include, given the increase in the number of staff and graduate students, research on Chinese language and linguistics, translations, Chinese religions, Chinese theatre studies, these four main areas of research remained relevant and important.<sup>4</sup>

The Department of Chinese Studies at the National University of Singapore has become one of the major centers for Chinese Studies, both in terms of research and teaching. By the year 2000, there were 30 professors in the department, with a large student population of close to 1200 undergraduate students and 96 graduate students (16 Ph.D. and 80 Masters’ students).<sup>5</sup> Other than teaching, one of the major contributions of the Department of Chinese Studies is its focus on research and publications. In Chinese linguistics, for example, staff such as Chen Chung Yu 陳重瑜, Lee Cher Ling 李子玲, Ng Siew Ai 黃秀愛, Xu Jie 徐傑, among others, have published extensively on Chinese syntax and semantics, grammar analysis, morphology and phonology, and tonal development. In Chinese literature, both classical and contemporary literature, the major scholars included Wong Yoon Wah 王潤華, Yeo Song Nian 楊松年, Pi Shu-min 皮述民, Hsiao-Wang Kuo-ying 蕭王國瓔, Kow Mei Kow 古美高, Wang Li-jian 王力堅, and Yung Sai-shing 容世誠. In Chinese history, major scholars included Lee En-han 李恩涵, Philip Leung Yuen-sang 梁元生, Billy So Kee Long 蘇基朗 and Lee Cheuk Yin 李焯然.

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<sup>3</sup> For reference, see Lee Cheuk Yin 李焯然 & Ngoi Guat Peng 魏月萍, “*Jin sanshi nian xingjiapo zhongguoxue yanjiu zongshu*” 近三十年新加坡中國學研究綜述 (An overview of Chinese studies in Singapore in the last 30 years), in *Year Book of International Research on Chinese Culture 1979-2009* 國際中國文化研究年鑒, Beijing: Foreign Languages Teaching and Research Press, 2013, pp. 41-57.

<sup>4</sup> For reference, please refer to Wong Yoon Wah & Yeo Song Nian eds., *Xinma hanxue yanjiu* 新馬漢學研究 (Chinese Studies in Singapore and Malaysia), Singapore: Department of Chinese Studies, National University of Singapore, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that other than the Department of Chinese Studies, NUS has a separate program under the Language Center that teaches the Chinese language at all levels. In addition, there are scholars working on Chinese studies in the Departments of Philosophy, Sociology, Economics, and Southeast Asian Studies.

The Department conducts programmes of study at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. For the B.A. and B.A. Honours programmes, the Department offers more than 50 courses in 5 major areas namely, Chinese linguistics, Chinese literature, Chinese history, Chinese philosophy and translation. For graduate studies, the Department currently offers a Ph.D. program and two M.A. programs (by research and by coursework) and a M.A. Double Degree Program with Peking University.<sup>6</sup>

The Department's main focus is on Chinese intellectual history, Chinese literature of the medieval period, Chinese in Southeast Asia, Chinese grammar and dialects. In recent years, the University has encouraged fuller development of research institutes or centres, paying more attention to research projects undertaken by both academic staff and postgraduates. In response to this new situation, the Department has taken measures to increase its enrolment of research students at home and abroad, and colleagues have also stepped up their research efforts. A recent trend in the Department has been to strengthen inter-disciplinary research and international collaboration. Not only have the academic works been published in influential journals or by major publishers in Singapore, Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, but some of them have also been published in international refereed journals in the West. This attests to the wide international recognition that has been accorded to the academic research in the Department.<sup>7</sup>

#### a. Research Groups

Four research groups-- The Chinese in Southeast Asia; Chinese Linguistics; Ming-Qing and Print & Popular Culture -- were established at the beginning of 2007 as strategic initiatives of the Department. The fifth group, Chinese Religions, was established in 2010. The goal of these groups is to provide a platform for faculty members as well as graduate students of different specializations but with a common research interest within the Department to spearhead and produce quality research. Since the establishment of these groups, many academic activities and exchanges have been conducted.

The projects conducted by staff of the Department also reflected their research interests. Some of the on-going work funded by research grants from the University include, among

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<sup>6</sup> Refer to Department of Chinese Studies, National University of Singapore, *Handbook 2011*.

<sup>7</sup> See Lee Cheuk Yin, "Guantong dongxi xueshu, hanrong duoyuan shijiao: tan xinjiapo guoli daxue zhongwenxi de fazhan yu dingwei" 貫通東西學術、涵融多元視角：談新加坡國立大學中文系的發展與定位 (Bridging East and West, Encompassing Multi-perspectives: The Development and Positioning of the Department of Chinese Studies, NUS), in Wong Yoon Wah ed., *Quanguo hua shidai de zhongwenxi* 全球化時代的中文系 (Chinese Department in the Global Age), Taipei: Wenshijie chubanshe, 2006, pp. 97-104.

others, Remnant Sounds of the Vast Ocean Qing Loyalist Ci Lyric in Republican China (A/P Lam Lap 林立), Cloud-based Interactive Chinese Character Learning (Dr Wang Hui 王惠), Teaching and Learning Chinese Characters using Cloud Computing Technology (A/P K.N. Chin 陳桂月 & Dr Wang Hui), Chinatowns and Ethnic Communities in Comparative Perspective (A/P Wong Sin Keung 黃賢強), Sun Yatsen and Southeast Asia (A/P Wang Sin Keung), Cantonese Opera Theatre at Hong Kong: A Social History 1925-1965 (PI: A/P Yung Sai Shing), Contemporary "Chinese" Language and Culture via Key Concepts in the Multimedia (Dr Adrian Tien 田映春), Spoken Vocabulary of Singapore Mandarin Chinese: A Corpus-driven Approach (A/P K.N. Chin), Chinese Discourse and Politeness (A/P Lee Cher Leng), Circuits of Cultural Entrepreneurship in China and SEA, 1900-1965 (Dr Nicolai Volland), An Exploration into Chinese Lexical Semantics through Cultural Keywords and Semantic Development of Chinese (Dr Adrian Tien), and Civilizational Dialogue: Confucianism and Islam Interactions in Late Imperial China (A/P Lee Cheuk Yin)

In 1982, a Publication Programme was initiated by the Department to promote the research activities of staff members and foster academic interaction with scholars from other parts of the world. Two books series were established under the leadership of Prof. Lee Cheuk Yin:

b. Monograph Series

Monograph Series on Southeast Asian Chinese 東南亞華人研究叢書

In this era when globalisation and regionalism have become two of the major forces shaping peoples' lives, the Department of Chinese Studies, in conjunction with World Scientific Publishing, launched a book series, Studies on Southeast Asian Chinese. To date 11 volumes have been published. These included:

1. *The Formation and Developments of Local Consciousness in Pre-War Malaysian-Singaporean* (Yeo Song Nian)
2. *East-West Cultural Clashes and Three Responses by Singaporean-Chinese Intellectuals* (Lee Guan Kin)
3. *Post-Colonial Chinese Literatures in Singapore and Malaysia* (Wong Yoon Wah)
4. *History of Chinese Literature in Singapore – A Preliminary Study* (Wong Meng Voon)
5. *Ethnic Chinese in Contemporary Indonesia* (Leo Suryadinata)

6. *History of Singapore Chinese Society* (Leong Yuen Sang)

7. *Factional Study of Chinese Society in Penang* (Goh Long Hoon)

*Sinology Series* 漢學論叢

Following the success of the “Southeast Asian Studies Series,” the Department of Chinese Studies began publishing the “Sinology Series.” Currently, this series is published on an irregular basis and the monographs, in the form of anthology of essays, have different themes and titles. Four such collections have been published:

1. *Excursion in Sinology* (Lee Cheuk Yin & James St. André)

2. *Civilized Protests: Essays on Modern China and the Chinese Diaspora* (Wong Sin Keung)

3. *Ming-Qing Studies: Examinations of Current Progress and Reflections on Methodology* (Lee Cheuk Yin)

4. *Evolving Cultural Memory in China and her Neighbours* (Lee Cheuk Yin & Hsiung Ping-Chen)

To promote studies on Southeast Asian ethnic cultures, the Department of Chinese Studies, in conjunction with Singapore Char Yong 茶陽 (Dabu) Association and Global Publishing Co., has been jointly publishing the Book Series on Hakka Culture since early 2012. To date 2 volumes have been released: *Exploring Hakka Society: Fieldwork, Cultural Studies and Studies on Singapore Hakka Associations and Culture*.

The Department of Chinese Studies is served by the Chinese Library in the University Central Library with 489,781 volumes of Chinese books and bound materials, together with subscriptions to 591 Chinese periodicals and 31 Chinese newspapers published in different parts of the world. There is a significant collection of Chinese classics, classical literature, modern literature, linguistics, history and philosophy. It also has a collection of about 1,000 periodicals published during the May Fourth period in China, as well as in the early years of Singapore and Malaysia. Some of these are rare, such as *Lat Pau* 叻報 (1887-1932), *Sing Po* 星報 (1890-1898), *Penang Sin Poe* 檳城新報 (1895-1941) and *Thien Nan Shin Po* 天南新報 (1898-1905).

The Department currently has about 50 PhD students doing full-time or part-time research on various Chinese studies topics. The research topics testify to the special research niches as well as the expanded range of expertise among the staff in the Department. These include topics such as Chinese conversational analysis and vernacular Chinese; the Chinese in Southeast Asia, including Chinese in Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia; Urban Chinese culture; and Chinese cultural production in Southeast Asia.

In addition to the Department of Chinese Studies, the National University of Singapore has set up two University level research institutes, the East Asia Institute (EAI) inaugurated in 1997, and the Asia Research Institute (ARI), founded in 2001. EAI is the successor of the former Institute of East Asian Political Economy (IEAPE), which was itself the successor of the Institute of East Asian Philosophies (IEAP), originally established in 1983 for the study of Confucianism. The founding Director of IEAP was Professor Wu Teh Yao 吳德耀, formerly President of the Taiwan Tung Hai University. The founding Director of EAI was Professor Wang Gungwu 王賡武, who was Vice Chancellor of the University of Hong Kong before joining EAI. The current Director is Professor Zheng Yongnian 鄭永年.<sup>8</sup>

These two institutes were founded to engender research on China and the East Asian region. The two have slightly different research agendas. The main mission of EAI is to promote both academic and policy-oriented research on East Asian development, particularly the political, economic and social development of contemporary China (including Hong Kong and Taiwan), and China's growing economic relations with the region and the world at large, including Japan, Korea and ASEAN. To promote academic exchange and to enable its research findings to reach out to a wider segment of the public, EAI organizes seminars and publishes research papers on a regular basis. EAI also participates in joint research projects with government ministries and statutory boards in Singapore, promotes collaborative programs with similar institutions in the region as well as organizes regional and international conferences and workshops on East Asian issues. In addition, EAI edits *China: An International Journal* (CIJ). Published thrice yearly by NUS Press, CIJ aims to present diverse international views on contemporary China, including Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan. The

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<sup>8</sup> East Asian Institute (EAI) is placed fifth overall in the Asia and the Pacific category (which excludes China, India, Japan and South Korea) of the 2013 Global Go To Think Tank Survey's annual rankings. EAI has retained its fifth position since it was first nominated in 2011. The 2013 international rankings report was released on 22 January 2014 by the University of Pennsylvania's Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program at the United Nations University and the World Bank in Washington DC. The ranking is based on a set of stringent selection criteria such as quality and commitment of think tank's leadership, quality and reputation of research staff as well as the research and analysis produced.

journal invites the submission of cutting-edge research articles, review articles and policy comments and research notes in the fields of politics, economics, society, geography, law, culture and international relations.

ARI has a wider purview, focusing on research for all of Asia, including East, Southeast and South Asia. It focuses on social science research, particularly anthropology, sociology, economics, and political science. At present, the research foci of ARI cover six main areas: Changing Family in Asia; Asian Migration; Religion and Globalization in Asian Contexts; Cultural Studies in Asia; Sustainable Cities; and Science Technology and Society.

### **Nanyang Technological University**

Inaugurated on 1 July 1991, Nanyang Technological University (NTU) started out as a teaching university which has today transformed into a research-intensive global university. Its predecessor institution, Nanyang Technological Institute was set up in 1981 on the grounds of the former Nanyang University.

Founded in 1955, Nanyang University was the first and only Chinese university established outside China and Taiwan. The idea of establishing a Chinese university was first mooted by Mr Tan Lark Sye 陳六使 on 16 January 1953. On 23 March 1953, the Hokkien Clan Association, under Mr Tan's leadership, donated 523 acres of land to set up the university. Mr Tan himself donated S\$5 million. His call for the establishment of the Chinese university received enthusiastic support from communities all over Southeast Asia. The first Chancellor of the Nanyang University was the famous Chinese scholar Lin Yu Tang 林語堂. The first batch of 584 students was admitted on 15 March 1956 with only three faculties: arts, science and commerce. Research activities began as early as 1957. The first batch of 437 students graduated in 1959. Seven years later in 1963, the student enrolment reached 2,324.

In 1980, Nanyang University closed its doors when it merged with the National University of Singapore. In 1981, Nanyang Technological Institute was set up on the premises of the former Nanyang University. In 1991, NTI merged with the National Institute of Education to form Nanyang Technological University (NTU). The alumni rolls of the former Nanyang University were transferred to NTU in 1996. NTU became autonomous in 2006 and is today one of the two largest public universities in Singapore. NTU has the following institutions that promote the study of the Chinese:

a. Division of Chinese, NTU

The Division of Chinese traces its roots to the foundation of Nanyang University in 1955, as well as the Centre for Chinese Language and Culture (CCLC), which was established in 1994. From July 2004, the Division of Chinese took over the teaching responsibilities that were previously offered by the CCLC, while continuing to offer a minor in Chinese and General Electives. In addition, the Division has launched its Graduate Program, and also offers scholarships to full-time MA and PhD research students. Since July 2005, it has expanded into a full-fledge division and has been offering BA (Honours) in Chinese.

The Division of Chinese has 14 teaching staff that covers Chinese language, literature, history, philosophy and Chinese-English translation. The current Head of the Division is A/P Quah Sy Ren 柯思仁, a Cambridge trained Chinese Theatre expert.

b. Centre for Chinese Language and Culture (CCLC), NTU

The Centre was established in 1994 as a teaching unit to provide Chinese modules to students of the NTU. When the Division of Chinese was founded, the Centre has transformed into a research institute focusing on the study of the history of the Nanyang University. CCLC's research foci include Chinese Education in Asia, Chinese Tradition and Pop Culture in Asia, Chinese Language and Dialects in Asia, Chinese Literature in Asia, Chinese Migration and Networks: Localization and Globalization.

## **Social Sciences**

It is in the social sciences that the periphery to centre to periphery trend is most evident. In the humanities, even though China itself was closed for research, the texts were readily available, making it possible for scholars to continue with their work. However, the nature of social science research largely requires fieldwork, and after the Communist takeover the fieldwork moved to Taiwan, Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. Within China itself, social science research was curtailed. We recall a colleague who noted that when he visited the eminent scholar, Fei Hsiao Tung 費孝通, he was shown a number of book manuscripts that Fei had written. They were all under lock and key and, as Fei elaborated, they could not be published. In fact, for anthropological research, Taiwan and Hong Kong substituted for China as field sites.

Researchers on Chinese religion, such as Arthur Wolf (1970, 1974, 1976, 1978), Emily Ahern (1973, 1975, 1981), Gary Seaman (1976, 1981), Steven Harrell (1976) J.K. Jordan



(1972) were really writing on the Chinese in Taiwan, not China. Similarly, Hugh Baker (1968, 1979), Berkowitz (1975), Barbara Ward (1965), and James Watson (1988) did their fieldwork in Hong Kong, not China. In social science research, interests in Sinology were primarily carried out by anthropologists, political scientists, economists, and sociologists.<sup>9</sup>

#### a. Religion

Early “academic” research on Chinese religion was primarily carried out in China. Such research were actually carried out by administrators and missionaries, such as DeGroot, Doolittle, Dore and Edkins, among others. This has led to serious bias in the analysis, but as empirical data, they provide a very important historical comparison for scholars. DeGroot’s (1892-1910) monumental six volume work, *The Religious System of the Chinese People*, attempted to depict “Chinese religion as it is actually practiced by the Nation”, from a social evolutionary perspective in vogue in his day. While there was little analysis (DeGroot was an administrator), his careful observations and detailed data is an important academic resource. Others who provided strong empirical data included Justus Doolittle, *Social Life of the Chinese* (1865), Joseph Edkins, *Religion in China* ([1878] 1910), H. Douglas (1887), R. Johnston (1910) and Henry Dore, *Researches into Chinese Superstitions* (1914). Many of these authors were missionaries, and the research was driven by a desire to convert the atheists, evidenced by such statements as “rank superstitions,” and “charlatanism”.

Serious academic scholarship on Chinese religion can be traced back to the work of Marcel Granet. *The Religion of the Chinese People*, first published in French in 1922, and translated into English by Freedman (1975), Granet set out to understand “total China.” He was fascinated by the fact that though the Chinese world is crisscrossed by sacred forces, its people seem to have no apparent religious preoccupation. Influenced by the Durkheimian school, he argues that Chinese practices were observed out of a spirit of tradition and a taste for conformity. C.K. Yang (1961), another Durkheimian scholar, began with a similar problem as Granet. Yang suggested that the importance of the ancestral cult lay in the integration and perpetuation of the family as a basic unit of Chinese society. Finally, Francis Hsu (1949) studied the Chinese in the village of West town, in Yunnan. Taking a psychological approach, *Under the Ancestor’s Shadow* notes the importance of the reciprocal relationship between

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<sup>9</sup> Given the volume of literature, it will be impossible to cover all aspects of the research on the Chinese outside China. In this paper, we focus on anthropological and sociological research, particularly in the areas of religion and ethnicity.

father and son and argues that Chinese social behaviour centers on authority and competition, and demonstrates the interrelationship between ancestors, kin organizations and economic relations.

After 1949, China as a field site was closed for anthropologists and sociologists. International scholars, especially British and Americans moved their research to Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Southeast Asia. The study of the Chinese and Chinese culture shifted from the center to the periphery. For example, Arthur Wolf conducted research in San-Hsia, Taiwan, Emily Ahern in Chi'nan, David DeGlopper (Lukang), Jordan (on rural Taiwanese village religion), Seaman (Shamanism), Feuchtwang (Geomancy), Margery Wolf (women in Chinese society), all regarded Taiwan as a substitute for understanding "Chinese culture and Chinese religion". Ahern, *The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village*, studied ancestor worship and lineage organizations in a village in northern Taiwan, concentrating on aspects of community organization that had the most influence on ancestral cults. She argued that ancestral worship reveals how groups are articulated and how they are subdivided along economic and political lines.

While American scholars generally conducted their fieldwork in Taiwan, British scholars, as expected, gravitated towards Hong Kong. Hugh Baker (1968, 1979) studied Chinese family and lineages in Sheung Shui and Barbara Ward (1965) on a fishing village in Hong Kong. Other scholars who conducted research in Hong Kong included James Watson (1982, 1988) on Chinese funerary rites, V. Burkhardt (1955) on Chinese creed and customs, Jack Potter (1978) on Cantonese shamanism, and Berkowitz (1975) on Chinese folk traditions. Again, like the scholars researching in Taiwan, Hong Kong became the closest approximation to conducting research and understanding Chinese culture.

The trajectory of research on Chinese religion and Chinese culture in Southeast Asia is slightly different. While Taiwan and Hong Kong were viewed as an approximate "representation" of China, countries in Southeast Asia, given that they were mostly multicultural nation-states, provided an opportunity to understand the continuity and discontinuities of Chinese religion and culture in different societies. No review of Chinese religion in Southeast Asia would be complete without acknowledging the immense contribution of Maurice Freedman (1957, 1965, and 1966).

In his study of family and kinship in Singapore, Freedman was primarily interested in the relationship between kinship and religion. He stresses the role of filial piety and the

understanding of ancestor worship. Freedman also raises the important dualism between the cult of immediate jural superior and the cult of descent group. He suggests that while the domestic cult was very nearly universal, the cult of descent group was absent whenever lineages were absent, and as such, in Singapore, given the lack of lineages because the immigrants did not bring with them the lineage organizations found in China, the cult of ancestor worship actually does not exist in Singapore, and by extension, any Chinese community in Southeast Asia. Rather, what is practiced is a kind of “memorialism”, a commemoration of forebears as it were, for their own sake.

Another important scholar is Marjorie Topley (1951, 1955, 1956, and 1967) who wrote on Chinese rites, Chinese vegetarian houses, and Chinese religious institutions. Other scholars who have conducted research on Chinese religion in Southeast Asia included Leon Comber (1954, 1955) on Chinese ancestor worship in Malaya, and J. Elliot (1964) on Chinese spirit medium cults. Elliot’s work was particularly important as it provided the most systematic account of Chinese spirit mediums in Singapore, including its theology and rituals. He also delved into divination, myths and theatre. Elliot argues that spirit mediumship are essentially temple based. Tong (1989) further developed the developments in spirit mediumship and suggests a relationship between knowledge and power in Chinese spirit medium practices. Sharon Carstens (1975), Hsieh Jann (1978) and Crissman (1967) worked on Chinese associations. The study of Chinese associations is particularly interesting as it shows how Chinese social organizations have changed and adapted to the different social conditions in Southeast Asian Chinese communities.

Increasingly, with the growth and development of Southeast Asian universities, there is a trend of indigenous scholars conducting research on Chinese religion in their own countries. Early research by indigenous scholars includes Han Wai Toon (1940) on the *Tuapekong* cult, H.M. Cheng (1949) on religious festivals, and P.L. Yip (1959) on the *Tua Pek Kong* temples, the local journal, *Journal of South Seas Society*, regularly published articles on Chinese religious practices in the region. Later contributions included the work of Vivienne Wee (1976, 1977 and 1989), C.K. Tong 唐志強 (1988, 1989 and 2004), and Kuah Khun Eng 柯群英 (1991, 2000) in Singapore, Tan Chee Beng 陳志明 (1985) on *DeJiao*, and H.T. Cheu (1988) on the Nine Emperor Gods in Malaysia. With the opening up of China, and the gradual relaxation of policies regarding religion and religious practices, we are seeing scholars conducting their research in China. Scholars such as Mayfair Yang 楊美惠 (2008) have worked on Chinese religiosities in China.

## b. Ethnicity

Perhaps even more so than Chinese religion, it is in the study of the Chinese in Southeast Asia that has made the most important contributions to the theoretical, conceptual and empirical understanding of identity and ethnic relations. As noted earlier, the Chinese in Southeast Asia constitutes 80 to 85 percent of the Chinese diaspora. More importantly, and which became a major research focus, the demographic profile and the position of the Chinese in these countries were quite different. While over 70% of her population in Singapore are Chinese, it is only 3% in Indonesia. Moreover, Southeast Asian host countries adopted different policies in dealing with the Chinese. In some, there is a degree of cultural assimilation while in others there are ethnic discrimination and ethnic conflicts. As such, sociological questions regarding identity, such as, who or what is a Chinese were raised. What are the markers of ethnic identity? How is ethnic identity constructed and negotiated? What is the ethnic relations? How is the 'other' conceptualized? What are the policies in dealing with the Chinese minority and what are the consequences? These have become pertinent areas of research.

Important sociological concepts in race and ethnic studies were actually developed using empirical data collected in Southeast Asia. Furnivall (1956), for example, coined the term "plural societies". He argued that towards the end of colonial rule in Southeast Asia, there were three "social orders", the natives, the Chinese and the Europeans, living side by side, but separately, save in the material and economic spheres. Boeke (1961) developed the concept of "dual society". He argued instead that economic growth and developments in trade and commerce created two separate sectors of society in Southeast Asia, one impoverished and under-developed, found in traditional rural areas, and the other westernized, affluent and capital intensive, located in the urban areas. Skinner's (1957, 1963) well known thesis on assimilation is based on research on the Chinese in Thailand. He argues that a majority of Chinese immigrants in each generation merged into Thai society and became indistinguishable from the indigenous population. He suggests that similarities in Thai and Chinese cultural practices aided assimilation. Purcell (1967: 290) working on Malaysia argues for ethnic persistence, that the Chinese retain their own identity and ethnicity, and "stubbornly refuse to cease to act and think as Chinese and were very conscious of themselves as a race."

The relationship between China and Southeast Asia goes back a long way. Many Southeast Asian states had a tributary relationship with Chinese dynasties. For example, the Thai state can trace its relationship with China all the way back to AD 650, during the Tang dynasty. While there were some political relationships, the interest was largely commercial,

such as setting up of trading networks. Chinese immigrants were found in Southeast Asia for centuries. In 1687, there were reports of 3000 Chinese immigrants living in Thailand. These were mostly merchants, political refugees, and peasants. In Indonesia, in places such as Sumatra and Indonesian Kalimantan, there are records of Chinese settlers who can trace their Chinese descent for up to 25 generations.

Thus, early research on the Chinese in Southeast Asia was primarily focused on migration (see for example, Saw, 1970, Yen 1986). Questions included how did they come? Where did they come from? Why did they come? Why did they leave? Largely demographic in nature, they were conceptually weak but does provide important background knowledge for later studies on ethnicity and Chinese communities in Southeast Asia. The next trend in scholarship on the Chinese in Southeast Asia focused on history, including the historical relationship between the Chinese immigrants and the host societies and the social and economic history of the Chinese. In Thailand, these included the works of Landon (1941), Coughlin (1960), Jiang (1966), and later by local Thai scholars, such as Punyodyana (1971), Tejapira (2001), and Pongsapich (2001). In Singapore, Yen (1986) looked at Chinese migration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, while Purcell (1967) and Loh (1988) explored the relationship between Chinese migrants and their homeland. In Malaysia, Yen (2000) looked at the migration of the Chinese to colonial Malaya, Wong (1964) detailed the economic activities of the early Chinese immigrants, and Abraham (2004) examined the colonial policies towards the Chinese in Malaya.

Williams (1960) provided the historical setting and the position of the Chinese immigrants during Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia; Coppel (2004) detailed the manipulation of race politics of the Dutch “Ethical Policy”, Pramoedya Ananta Toer (2007) examined the rise of Indonesian nationalism, while Hoon (2006a; 2006b) explored the post-Suharto years. Scholars who worked on the Chinese in Burma included Steinberg (1982), Mya Maung (1990), Taylor (1993), and Mya Than (1997). Ky (1963) and Le (2004) examined the early migration of the Chinese and their settlement pattern in Vietnam while Marsot (1993) detailed social segregation as well as the economic activities of the Chinese. Chang (1982) and Amer (1991) looked at the post-independent period in Vietnam, especially policies regarding the Chinese. Purcell (1965), Tan (1982), Dobbin (1996) and Weightman (1998) examined the influx of Chinese migrants to the Philippines, the policies of the Spanish, including the massacres and expulsion of the Chinese, and the anti-Chinese sentiments in the colonial period, while See

(1983) and Go (1996) wrote on the socio-economic and political situation of the Chinese in post-colonial and independent Philippines.

Later research on the Chinese in Southeast Asia was largely taken up by anthropologists and sociologists, many of them local scholars who have completed their graduate studies in universities in the West. Being anthropologists, they focused on community studies of the Chinese in Southeast Asia. For example, in Indonesia, Mely Tan (1991) worked on the Chinese of Semarang, while Go (1968) studied the assimilation of the Chinese in Indonesia. Others who studied Indonesian Chinese were L. Suryadinata (2000, 2001) and Toer (2007). Thai scholars who worked on the Chinese community included, Punyodyana (1971, 1976), Ossapan (1979), Pongsapich (2001), and Tejapira (1997, 2001). Extensive research on the Chinese in the Philippines were carried out by A.S. Tan (1972, 1985), S.K. Tan (1992) and Ang See (1997, 2004) and Carino (1994). In Malaysia, reference works on the Chinese were conducted by C.B. Tan (1997, 2000), Heng (1988), Phang (2000), Loh (2000) and Abraham (2004). Given the large numbers of Chinese immigrants in Singapore, there is a large volume of literature, including Yen (1986), Ong (1974), Hsieh (1978), Clammer (1981a; 1981b), Chiew (1983), L.K. Cheng (1985) and Kuo (1987).

While these researches were conducted on the Chinese in different countries in Southeast Asia, they raise common questions. Many deal with the social organizational, economic and political situation of the Chinese in the host countries. Others looked at the educational systems, particularly the establishment of Chinese schools. Still others examined the development of associations and the social structure of Chinese communities in Southeast Asia.

Several central questions occupy scholars working on the Chinese in Southeast Asia. The first, and one which seem strange for mainland China scholars, or even in Taiwan and Hong Kong, is “Who and what is a Chinese? Given the immigrant status of the Chinese and with intermarriage with the indigenous population, a description of what constitutes Chineseness for the Southeast Asian Chinese remains elusive. Wang (1999) noted that there is nothing absolute about being Chinese. Goodman (1997) described it as a fragile identity. Thus to understand Chineseness in Southeast Asia requires a nuanced grasp of the particular context framing the development of Chineseness across history and geography. There is in fact multiple Chineseness in Southeast Asia. In different countries in Southeast Asia, different markers are used to define their ethnic identity. Moreover, as a minority group, the Chinese in Southeast Asia have had to constantly manage and negotiate their identity, particularly in the public

sphere. Thus, not only is there multiple Chineseness, ethnic identity of the Chinese in Southeast Asia is changeable, culturally and ecologically defined, and situationally sensitive. Ethnic identification is a “strategic choice.”

Another central question dealt with by many scholars who work on the Chinese in Southeast Asia is ethnic relations. As noted earlier, Southeast Asian host countries exhibit very different stances in dealing with the Chinese immigrant minority. For example, Thailand is dominated by the “Tai” people who have allegedly assimilated the Chinese into Thai society. One supposedly witnesses a similar scenario in the Philippines. In Malaysia and Indonesia, ethnic relations is marked by ethnic conflict and discrimination. Many of the authors cited above, but most evident in the work of Malaysian and Indonesian scholars, worked on the nature and processes of ethnic relations and interactions between the members of the host societies and the Chinese population in different countries. It is important to remember that ethnic relations exist because of the systematic distinctions between the insider and the outsider, between “us’ and “them”. It deals with issues of inequality and conflict.

In Southeast Asia, the Chinese - because of their numbers, their perceived economic wealth, and the rise of ethnonationalism - are regarded as the “Other.” In Southeast Asia, despite the fact that most Southeast Asian countries are multicultural societies (for example, there are over 300 different ethnic groups in Indonesia), the stereotypical “Other” is often the Chinese. Governments, whether in Thailand, Malaysia or Indonesia, used the Chinese “other” as the basis for national policy. With the rise of Thai nationalism from 1914 when Rama VI declared that the Chinese “the Jews of the East” to the Phibun Songkram era in the 1930s to the 1959s, the Chinese became victims of prejudice and discrimination.

### **From Periphery to Centres: The Rise of China**

Since the late 1970s, we have witnessed the phenomenal rise of China. What is the impact of this on Chinese studies in Southeast Asia? Before discussing this, it may be useful to briefly describe what this rise of China is. I suggest that it can be classified into four categories. Most obvious is of course the economic rise. China today is the second largest economy in the world. In 2006, China’s GDP had risen to almost 2 trillion dollars, from only 45 billion in 1978. In 1978, the GDP per capita was \$50. In 2008, it was \$2520. In the 1980s and 1990s China growth rate was between 10 to 15% per year. It is projected that before 2050, China will have the largest economy in the world. This economic muscle has resulted in greater political influence

on the world stage, especially in the increasing use of soft power. For example, in 2006 when China hosted a Sino-African summit, practically every major leader from 48 African states attended the summit. China is also developing hard power. It has dramatically increased its military spending and the acquisition of advance technology in modern warfare. It is fast becoming the dominant military power in Asia, including in recent years building a “blue water” navy through the acquisition of its first aircraft carrier.

China’s military rise is a cause for concern for many East and Southeast Asian countries. However, in our view, it is in the rise of “cultural China” that may pose the greatest challenge to its neighbours. China and the Chinese have become increasingly affluent, confident, and assertive as a nation. This is also rising nationalism among Chinese youth, exemplified in the demonstrations and riots against the Japanese and Japanese companies in many Chinese cities in 2005.

In terms of education, especially higher education, China has significantly increased its investment in universities and in publications and research. There is a concerted effort to build world class universities to compete with the best in the world, seen in the C9 League, an alliance of 9 top universities in China. Many of the top universities in the world, including Duke, New York University, and many others, are setting up campuses in China. Recently, it has been claimed that China’s publication in top journals has already overtaken that of the US. It has made great strides in science and technology research, and although those in the humanities and social sciences are lagging behind, it is improving rapidly. China has gradually opened up the country for international scholars to conduct research. Many of the second tier universities are also very ambitious. With increased funding and support, it is likely that the center for China studies will move back to the center.

Our view is that China, and Chinese universities will become major centers for academic research. However, it will not be the only center, rather there will be other centers of Chinese Studies or China Studies working with and at the same time, competing with China. For example, Taiwan will remain a center for Chinese Studies. China is huge and learning very fast. But it will take time for them to claim the center again in every aspect of Chinese studies. Chinese studies in Taiwan picked up rapidly because a pool of bright young scholars graduated from top American universities, returned to Taiwan, and joined academic institutions during the 1970s and 1980s. Together with the fact that Western scholars were unable to China during that period and conducted their fieldwork in Taiwan, it resulted in Taiwanese universities being on the cutting edge of Chinese Studies research. Another center for China Studies will be Hong



Kong. Hong Kong has three universities among the top ten in Asia. This attests to the intellectual talent and research capacity in Hong Kong. Since the 1990s, apparently, many of their universities have reoriented their humanities and social science research away from Southeast Asia and focussed primarily on China Studies. Many of its top universities have also established linkages and joint programs with universities on the mainland.

Other than Taiwan and Hong Kong, a third center is located in universities and research institutes in Southeast Asia. The rise of China has led to a reorientation of the Chinese overseas. There have been significant changes in the way states conduct themselves and their attitudes towards the ethnic Chinese. Due to its economic potential, Chinese language is now taught in Thai schools and universities. Similarly, in Indonesia, where the Chinese language was previously banned under the Suharto regime, there is now support for the Chinese community, and there appears to be a re-sinification that puts the Chinese in a strong economic and social position. A similar resurgence of Chinese culture is also observed in the Philippines, Thailand, and Malaysia. One effect of the rise of China is the increased investments in the Chinese economy by the Chinese overseas. This renewed interest in things Chinese will have an effect in terms of China studies in the universities in Southeast Asian countries. Finally, the fourth centre will be universities in the West - whether in the US or in Europe - which have seen renewed interests in Chinese language courses, modules on how to do business in China, as well as increasing number of students on exchange programs in Chinese universities.

There are presently many mainland Chinese scholars who are doing well in American universities, but the pull factors for them to return home are not strong yet. In certain fields, such as religious studies, gender studies, empirical research it will be many years before they can compete with universities outside China. Even so China's investments in education, the growing number of world-class Chinese universities, the vast resources in funds for teaching, research and publications, the intellectual capacity, changes in the remuneration structure in Chinese universities will, in the long term, lead to China being a major centre in China Studies. However, as we have argued in the paper, the future of Chinese Studies will be multi-centred.

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