Malayanized Chinese-language cinema: on Yi Shui's *Lion City, Black Gold*, and film writings

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ABSTRACT This article discusses how the Singaporean Chinese director, Yi Shui, created a Malayanized Chinese-language cinema during the 1950s and 1960s, and offers a retrospective of the way people in Malaya and Singapore framed their nation-building discourse in terms of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism after the Bandung Conference in 1955. This article holds that the term *huayu dianying* (Chinese-language cinema) was not first used in the 1990s by scholars in Hong Kong and Taiwan, but that its origins can be traced to Singapore and Malaya in the 1950s where Yi Shui promoted Malayanized Chinese-language cinema in the *Nanyang Siang Pau*. This earlier use of the term "Chinese-language cinema" overlaps with its current academic usage, including films in Mandarin and Chinese dialects. In 1959, Yi Shui's essays were collected in *On Issues of the Malayanization of Chinese-Language Cinema*. Yi Shui also directed several Malayanized Chinese-language films. This article analyzes his "Chinese language cinema" film practice by examining the discourses surrounding the "Malayanization of Chinese-language cinema" in order to show that his semi-documentary *Lion City* and the melodrama *Black Gold* attempted to mediate the misunderstandings rooted in the national boundaries and politics of various dialect groups through a "multi-lingual symbiosis" of Chinese languages.

KEYWORDS: Chinese-language cinema; Yi Shui; Malayanization; the Third World; *The Lion City*; *Black Gold*

Foreword

The term "*huayu dianying*," or "Chinese-language cinema,"[1] is widely used in academia as a "comprehensive term that covers all the local, national, regional, transnational, diasporic, and global cinemas relating to the Chinese language" (Lu and Yeh 2005, 2). This is primarily due to Sheldon H. Lu and Emilie Yueh-Yu Yeh's promotion of the term. They theorized it, made it mainstream,[2] and provided it with a precise meaning: "Chinese-language films that use predominantly Chinese dialects and are made in mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the Chinese diaspora, as well as those produced through transnational collaborations with other film industries" (Lu and Yeh 2005, 1). There is no doubt that Emilie Yueh-Yu Yeh was the first to use the term in English-language academia (Tang and Feng 2011, 72), but the theory that "this term was originally introduced by scholars based in Taiwan and Hong Kong in the early 1990s" (Lu and Yeh 2005, 10) [3] remains open to debate. The Singapore Cathay Productions director and distributor Yi Shui (1914-1973)[4] was vigorously promoting "Chinese-language cinema" in the "art of cinema" section of the *Nanyang Siang Pau* far earlier, between November 1958 and May 1959. Subsequently, these essays were included in the 1959 book *On Issues of the Malayanization of Chinese-Language Cinema*. Yi Shui also practiced what he preached, shooting several Malayanized Chinese-language films of his own.

This article will review *On Issues of the Malayanization of Chinese-language Cinema,* as well as Yi Shui's film practice, in order to examine how "Chinese-language cinema" found its place in Singapore and Malaya and how it met the demands of geographically, linguistically, and culturally diverse Chinese cinema audiences. This analysis will be contextualized by the third-world politics of Malayanization of the 1950s and 1960s, as well as an exploration of the use of the term "Chinese language." It will show how the use of this term to simultaneously refer to both Mandarin and dialect group communities became a bargaining chip in coping with political pressure from the powerful English and Malay language communities. This article also analyzes Yi Shui's "Chinese language cinema" film practice, examining the discourses in Singaporean and Malaya newspapers surrounding the "Malayanization of Chinese-language Cinema" in order to show that his semi-documentary third-world cinema film *The Lion City* (*Shi Zi Cheng*) and the melodrama *Black Gold* (*Hei Jin*) attempted to mediate the misunderstandings rooted in national

boundaries and the political ideologies of various dialect groups by means of a "multi-lingual symbiosis" of multiple Chinese languages.

Multiple Chinese languages: Yi Shui's Chinese-language cinema

The term *huayu* (Chinese language) can be used in a broad sense or a narrow sense. The broad sense is "the languages used by Chinese people in Singapore and Malaysia. In addition to Mandarin, it also includes all dialects or topolects used by Chinese groups" (Yang 1990, 479). The narrow sense means "a lingua franca spoken by Chinese people, called *putonghua* Standard Chinese) or *hanyu* (Han language) by Chinese people, not including dialects" (Yang 1990, 479). Influenced by the Singaporean/Malaysian "Speak Mandarin Campaign," which advocates "speaking Mandarin (*huayu*) more and dialects less," the former broad sense has been forgotten, replaced by the narrow sense. However, recently Emilie Yueh-Yu Yeh has perceptively observed that "Singaporean *huayu* is actually an inclusive concept, covering all languages such as Hokkien, Cantonese, Hakka, Chaozhouese, Hainanese, and Mandarin. The term "*huayu*" in itself is a plural and expresses an inclusiveness and a complex linguistic situation" (Tang and Feng 2011, 73).

In 1950s South-East Asia, the term "*huayu*" was frequently seen in print. Scholars believed that it was a popular "new word" born out of the Singapore and Malayan Independence Movement period, "used to replace the word "*guoyu*" (Loo 1984, 43). Yi Shui's book *On Issues of the Malayanization of Chinese-language Cinema* was a product of the 1950s societal milieu. Prior to the 1950s, most of the South-East Asian film journals, such as *Leisure Bell* (*Xiao Xian Zhong*), *Sea Star* (*Hai Xin*), and *Marlborough* (*Man Wu Luo*) in the 1920s and *Entertainment* (*Yu Le*) in the 1940s, used terms such as *guochan dianying* (domestically produced films) or *guo pian* (domestic films) to describe films imported from China. Cantonese films from the south of China or Hong Kong were called *yue pian* (Cantonese films). After the 1950s, a subtle change started to appear. Formulations such as *huayu zhong de XX pian* (XX film in the Chinese language), *huayu dianying* (Chinese-language film), or *huayu pian* (Chinese-language film) gradually replaced *guo pian*, *yue pian* and other regional language-based terms for these films. For example, the *New Paper* (*Xin bao*) of the 21st of July 1956 carried an anonymous article on a page dedicated to a "movement to oppose porn culture and nurture a healthy and progressive

culture": "Cantonese films in Chinese language [*huayu zhong de yue pian*] specialize in intoxicating the audience with 'butterfly and mandarin duck' style love songs and tragedies, and martial arts" (Anon 1956a). In 1960, *Film Weekly* (*Dianying Zhoubao*) also used "*huayu dianying*" (Chinese-language film) to refer to films such as the Cantonese films *Love in Malaya* and *Belle of Penang*, and the Amoy films *Lovesickness Sent from Afar*(*YaoYuan Ji Xiangsi*) and *Love Deep as the Sea* (*EnQing Shen Si Hai*) (Ma 1960).

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

"Chinese-language cinema" needed to meet the demands of Chinese cinema audiences from diverse geographic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds living in Singapore and Malaya. Before he became a film editor and director, Yi Shui was responsible for the distribution of Chinese-language films in Singapore and Malaya on behalf of Singapore Cathay Productions. He soon realized the differences between Chinese cinema audiences in Singapore and Malaya. However, these differences did not mean that groups of a certain geographical origin would reject films made in the dialect of another region: "The audience of Cantonese films is not limited to those

with Cantonese ancestry, and the audience of Amoy films is not limited to those with a background in Fujian" (Yi 1959, 33). The reason for this was "they can understand multiple Chinese languages" (33). Yi Shui believed that the multilingual qualities of Chinese-language film at the time "were a powerful tool for multilingual education" (33). Between the Second World War and 1965, Hong Kong production companies had close relations with cinemas in Singapore and Malaya. Many film companies relied on funding from cinemas in Singapore and Malaya; without these cinemas purchasing the right to screen the films in advance, many films would not have been made. Therefore, during the Cold War film funding flowed between Singapore, Malaya, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, and any Chinese-language film that rejected other regional language groups limited its reach. Therefore, one cannot simply use the "*guoyu*" (national language) or "national film" framework of "One China" to view Chinese-language film.

Yi Shui's broad perspective is largely similar to the current grand aim for Chinese-language film to be "homogenous and heterogenous" (Tang and Feng 2011, 75); that is, to not only cover films made on the Chinese mainland, but also to include "films in Chinese from Taiwan, Hong Kong, South-East Asia, Europe, and the US" (73). Yi Shui used the term "*huayu pian*" (Chinese-language film) to refer to Taiwanese films in Mandarin and Amoy (Yi Shui 1959, 109). He also used the terms "*huayu dianying*" and "*huayu pian*" to refer to "*guoyu pian*" (such as *Rainstorm in Chinatown* [*Fengyu Niu Che Shui*, 1956] and *Door of Prosperity* [*Xingfu Zi Men*, 1959]), Cantonese films (such as *Belle of Penang* [*Pincheng Yan*, 1954]), and Amoy films (such as *Lovesickness Sent from Afar* [*YaoYuan Ji Xiangsi*, 1955]) that were imported from Hong Kong. These films are characterized by the cross-regional flow of film funding, and were all set in Malaya and Singapore. They were also all films that Yi (1959, 4) suggested distributing in Singapore and Malaya to Cathay Productions chairperson Loke Wan-tho.

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

Yi Shui was more accepting of Malay than he was of English. He was dissatisfied with Malayan officials who gave addresses in English when the Asian Film Festival was held in Malaya. In contrast, the Japanese chair of the Asian Film Producers' Society Nagata Masaichi spoke in Japanese with an English translation. Yi Shui believed that as Malay was the "national language" of Malaya and Singapore, Malayan officials "should give addresses in the Malayan national language, or at least use the national language and English simultaneously" (Yi Shui 1959, 33). This shows Yi Shui's resistance to the language of the colonizer. It is worth noting that the method of his resistance was to enhance his advocacy of "Chinese-language cinema" and not Malay films categorized as "national language" cinema. In his book, Yi Shui described his hopes for the "national language" cinema of the future: "Chinese people will understand the films both visually and aurally, because the films will have absorbed Chinese vocabulary in greater quantity and to a wider extent so that it is easy for Chinese people to learn and understand" (33). This hope, derided by Yi Shui himself as "sleep talking," reveals the author's cultural worries. He admitted that "the national language of today is stuck in a stage of extreme backwardness and poverty" (33). On multiple occasions, he worried that Chinese groups would not accept Malay films under the category of "national language films," as "Chinese people look down on Malay films and Indian films out of a strange sense of 'superiority'…" (34). In addition to calling for increased efforts in translating Chinese, Malay, and Indian films, he hoped that "films in these three languages should develop simultaneously with the development of Malayan culture" (34). Here, he chooses to use "films in these three languages" instead of promoting "national language" films as a bridge towards "Malayanization." This implicitly shows Yi Shui's cultural confidence in the ability of "Chinese-language cinema" to appeal to the emotions of fellow countrymen from all ethnicities speaking different Chinese dialects, and is a final act of cultural resistance in the face of losing *guoyu* as a term for Chinese language. Yi Shui hoped to promote "Chinese-language cinema" in "multiple Chinese languages."

In addition to regarding this cinema as "an alternative national cinema" for Malayan Chinese people (Mak 2009, 154), we must also examine it in an Asian-African-Latin American context long overlooked by first and Second World cinemas: "Third World film." "Third World film" generally refers to films produced in Third World regions (Stam 2000, 100). According to Roy Armes' research into Third World film, the term has three layers. First, "national" cinemas worked towards by local cinema workers inspired by the model of popular Hollywood film

before the concept of the "Third World" became widespread (Armes 1987, 54). An example of this is the series of anti-imperialist films[5] made by the Shanghai Lianhua company in the 1930s. Secondly, there is the group of talented auteur directors that emerged at the end of the 1950s. Their films have a strong realist style, representing Third World society and local life. Thirdly, there are films of the 1960s and early 1970s that make political demands. These are the foundation of "Third Cinema" theory[6] (54). Only by placing Yi Shui's Malayanized Chinese-language film in the historical context of the first and second layers in particular can we understand that the various imperfections in his films are down to external challenges, such as the limits imposed by British colonial language policy, race policy, political censorship, film funding, and the human and material requirements for filming.

Malayanization: Yi Shui's third world cinema

The British colonial government introduced the "Malayanization" policy at the end of 1948. The main aim of this was to "defeat the communists and win support from the Chinese community" (Oong 2000, 139). As this was a top-down policy, it elicited strong resistance from Chinese civil society when it was used to guide reform in Chinese schools. The *Sin Chew Daily* of 27 April 1952 tells how the Chinese Schools Association attacked the colonial government's policy of "Malayanization." They believed that the Chinese school curriculum should nurture a broader worldview over a narrow Malayan consciousness. The headline of the *New Paper* of 11 September 1952 read "In the noise of Malayanization, there is hope for independence of Malaya." This article accused the British colonial government of using "Malayanization" to restrict the development of Chinese schools. The author suspected that the "Malayanization" policy was targeted specifically at Chinese people: "This is supported by the harshness of the criticism of Overseas Chinese culture from people in the upper echelons of Malayan society" (Chun Can 1952).

History has proven that this author's misgivings were justified. In early 1956, an all-party committee published a report examining why Chinese people resisted the "Malayanization" of textbooks. The reason was that the colonial government had not implemented this policy equally: English language schools still used British textbooks, and the authorities had never demanded that they be "Malayanized" (Singapore Government 1956, 13). This report suggested that equal

policies be implemented across all schools, including paying teachers in Chinese and English schools an equal wage (19). It also held that as over 80% of Singapore's population used Chinese, the government's repression of the language's development was not in concordance with political reality, and that Chinese people's defense of Chinese education was a collective expression of inner fears: that if the Chinese language was suppressed, then the cultural basis of their existence as a community would be destroyed (4). The report's recommendations were almost completely accepted by the government of the time and published as an "Education White Paper."

This policy, beneficial to the development of Chinese schools, was fundamentally the result of the governing party attempting to calm the impact of the April 1955 Legislative Assembly elections. In these, 225,000 Chinese first-time voters expressed their dissatisfaction with the British government's bias against Chinese education at the ballot box. Many voted for the People's Action Party (PAP) opposition, which had promised to defend Chinese education. Three PAP members were elected to the Assembly (Goh 2008, 55-59), forcing the governing party to acknowledge Chinese-educated voters.

Actually, the PAP also supported "Malayanization," but with a slightly different emphasis. In the general election of 1955, the PAP called for the government to implement a public servant "Malayanization" policy, acknowledge Chinese, Malay, and Tamil as official languages, merge Singapore and Malaya, and give citizen's rights to all Malayans regardless of race, creed, or language (Choi 2007, 393). These demands were also abstracted into the "Malayanization" political agenda. "Malayanization" was a political slogan heard everywhere in 1950s Malaya and Singapore. The ultimate goal of the movement was to unite all ethnicities in opposition to the Communist party, and it did not include Singaporean and Malayan independence. However, the anti-colonial parties of the 1950s transformed the ideology of "Malayanization" into the outline of an independent state that nurtured "Malayan consciousness."

The 1950s saw the countries of Asia and Africa stride towards independence, and 29 Asian and African leaders gathered for a meeting in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955. This meeting saw the first use of the term "Third World," and Third World identity started to solidify from this point on. This term gradually caught on with the global media, intellectuals and nationalists in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The Third World refers to "the colonized, neo-colonized or decolonized nations and 'minorities' of the world whose economic and political structures have

been shaped and deformed within the colonial process" (Stam 2000, 93). In addition, Zhou Enlai, representing China, signed the *Convention on the Issue of Dual Nationality* with Indonesia at this conference. This marked a "fundamental change in the policy of Communist China towards Overseas Chinese… the final conclusion of the 'bloodline' nationality principle" (Liu 2010, 84). Overseas Chinese people had to choose between taking local nationality or Chinese nationality.

The turbulent historical and political context of the 1950s meant that Yi Shui, like other Chinese-educated people at the time, did not have much choice but to support the PAP's "Malayanization" and multilingual policies, and the demand for the independence and merging of Singapore and Malaya. "Malayanized Chinese-language cinema" is a response to the nation-building discourse generated by the background of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism around the time of Malayan independence in 1957: "After Malayan independence, it will be urgently necessary to establish a unique Malayan culture. This unique culture is the substance of Malayanization" (Yi 1959, 4). Yi Shui also quoted Han Su-yin (Tang Guang-hu) in a lecture in the Cathay Productions actor training class, saying that "Malaya's culture is a mix of China and the West, and currently Malaya is researching the commonality between Eastern and Western culture in establishing its own independent culture" (5). This Malayanized culture included Chinese cultural traditions, Malay culture, Indian culture, and Western culture. Although Yi Shui recognized that these four great cultures had yet to "form a hybridized overall culture" in Malaya (4), he was happy to map out a path towards this with his "Malayanized Chinese-language cinema."

Yi Shui's explanation of the principles of "Malayanized Chinese-language cinema" was direct: "not only must the stories contain the reality of the lives of the Malayan people, but the films must be shot by Malayans" (Yi Shui 1959, 2). One reason for making Malayanized Chinese-language films was that Yi Shui was dissatisfied with the way in which First World Anglo-American films shot in Malaya, such as the 1956 British film *A Town Like Alice*, could not represent the real Malaya. Yi Shui asked himself, "Why can we not make films about stories that we are familiar with, while these foreigners with absolutely no understanding of local circumstances come here and do it for us?" (1).

A Town Like Alice was adapted from Nevil Shute's popular novel, and is set in the Second World War. After Kuala Lumpur falls to the Japanese Army, a group of white people working for the British colonial government are taken prisoner, while their families are abandoned in

Malaya. This group of white women and children, nobly assisted by a Japanese soldier, set out on foot from Kuala Lumpur, crossing mountains on a long hike to the port at Kuantan, hoping to catch a boat to Singapore. However, the journey is hard, and over half of the women and children die on the way. Finally, the surviving female lead settles in a Malay village, with the agreement of its *kampung* chief, to avoid the chaos of war. Through portraying white men, women, and children victimized in Malaya, this film attempts to persuade the people of Singapore and Malaya that British people were also victims of the Japanese Army. This is evidently an attempt to exonerate the British Army for its panicked retreat from South-East Asia during the Second World War, leaving the people of Malaya at the mercy of Japanese forces.

Also, the film represents the aid given to the British by Malays in a positive light, while negatively depicting the profit-driven behaviour of South-East Asian Chinese merchants. One sequence shows the female lead holding a crying child as she arrives at a Chinese pawn shop hoping to pawn her shoes for milk. The director uses a medium shot to show the child bawling with hunger, in dire need of help. The Chinese trader to one side, however, refuses to trade. A Chinese woman, wearing traditional Chinese clothing and speaking Cantonese in a venomous tone, manages to persuade the merchant, though he still mutters "there's hardly any milk left in the shop, how can we trade it away?." The film clearly tries to imply that as Chinese people are not Bumiputra (indigenous Malays), they are unwilling to risk Japanese interrogation to protect these white people as the village chief did. Rather, in the chaos of war they show their true profiteering nature. Yi Shui not only felt that these scenes did not correspond to the charitable image of Chinese merchants in South-East Asia, but also felt that the focus on these white people experiencing hardships in Malaya did not correspond to the Malayan lived experience of the Second World War. This is one of the reasons he accused British films of taking liberties in depicting Malayan history.

Yi Shui also criticized Hong Kong films that traded on their Malayan theme: they "merely dash in and snatch a few location shots for a background force in a story and characters. These films, sugar-coated with a Malayan covering, are amazingly popular. Based on their cultural value, we reject these works, and cannot regard them as Malayanized Chinese-language film" (Yi Shui 1959, 2). Yi Shui's criticism of Hong Kong films, though rather extreme, does reflect the cultural resistance of local film workers in the first stages of exploring how to deal with the inroads of external mass cultural hegemony. Yi Shui resisted these cultural hegemonies with

Malayanized Third World cinema. Yi Shui advocated making Malayanized Chinese-language films to respond to the way in which the suffering of Chinese people was hidden in post-war First World British and Hong Kong films.

Yi Shui's films, like those of other mid-1950s Third Word Cinema directors, use realism as way to open up the fictional feature film (Armes 1987, 80). Key words and phrases tinged with the left-wing intellectual structure of realism, such as "truth" (*zhenshi*), "classic type" (*dianxing*), and "experience life" (*tiyan shenghuo*) are seen in all of Yi Shui's books. In 1957 Yi Shui ran the Cathay Productions actor training class, and taught film studies to the students. The Chinese, English, and Japanese books on his set text list not only include classics of realism such as Stanislavsky's *An Actor Prepares*, but also works entitled *French Cinema* and *New Cinema* (Yi Shui 1959, 70). These books give us a glimpse of Yi Shui's broad perspective, stretching from First World cinema to Second World and Third World cinema.

Living in 1950s Singapore, in the Third World and under Western colonialism, it is not surprising that Yi Shui chose the realism of Third World cinema as the main goal of his cinematic practice. While making his films, Yi Shui would shoot and edit news and documentary films on the side. One essay in *On Issues of the Malayanization of Chinese-Language Cinema* records how he helped to make news and documentary films with cultural and historical value for Singapore and Malaya, such as the 1955 news film *Ceremony for the Establishment of Nanyang University* (*Nanda Chengli Dianli*). These experiences gave his first film, *Lion City*, a pronounced "documentary" style. His Third World films contain characteristic features of the "cinema of discovery," and their aim is to confront reality, with a camera, and to document it, filming realistically, filming underdevelopment with the optic of the people (Birri 1997, 94). In his book, he praises the director of the Italian realist classic *The Bicycle Thieves* Victoria De Sica, because he "represents the development of realism in Italian cinema…shaking world cinema" (Yi Shui 1959, 105), but he subsequently informs his readers with regret that "now Italian cinema has again turned towards the style of Hollywood, with million dollar calls, but De Sica cannot make million dollar films" (105). The intellectual structure and experience of work mentioned above shows Yi Shui's emerging identity as a Third World intellectual, albeit one with only gentle, vaguely left-wing beliefs.

The Lion City and *Black Gold*: Yi Shui's cinematic practice

Yi Shui spent $120,000 of Cathay Keris's money to make *The Lion City* (Hamzah 1997, 80).[7] The film took nearly a year to complete, and was publicly screened at the end of 1960 to unprecedented promotion. The film's theme was found everywhere in print: "The first Malayanized Chinese-language film: portrays Singapore as it moves from a colony to self-government" (Anon 1960a). Intriguingly, the Prime Minister of the Singapore autonomous government Lee Kuan Yew and several dozen ministers were invited to the cinema as guests of honour. However, at the time, this was not surprising. Before *Lion City*, Cathay Productions had helped the PAP film news documentaries such as *Our Minister* (*WoMen De BuZhang*). Cathay Productions employees from Yi Shui up to general manager Thomas Hodge had always maintained close contact with government officials. Experts believe that this is the reason why Cathay Productions films "rarely engaged with politically sensitive topics" (Mak 2009, 62). *Lion City* appeared to be a "semi-documentary drama" that was "politically correct" (184). The film reflects changes in Singaporean daily life between 1958 and 1959 against the background of the general election and the PAP's Anti-Pornography Movement. Yi Shui, using mildly leftist rhetoric, set the theme of *Lion City*: it "expresses the descent and corruption of the people's lives under the old government, and the upward momentum and striving for progress in the era of self-government" (Yi 1960a). Over half way through the film, to the accompaniment of the sound of a clock, a close up shot shifts down from a clock, symbolizing the passing of the eras, to a radio placed in the centre of the living room playing a song to celebrate the victory of the PAP in the 1959 general election. A husband and wife joyfully celebrate the change of era in song. Directly after this, the scene changes and a crowd of police appear. They seal pinball machines up and forbid the use of jukeboxes in cafes: cafes were accused of using these machines to lure young men and women in to flirt and gamble. The pinball machines and jukebox represented in the film have long disappeared from Singapore; *Lion City* unwittingly preserved the final swansong of these cafes on film, even though Yi Shui hated them.

He stated at the time that he wanted to "execute" the character Li Xiulan, a pinball machine girl (Yi 960a): at the start of the film she flirts with the scion of a rich family before falling pregnant with his child. He abandons her, and she dies in childbirth. In comparison, the main

female character Feng Ling, also from a poor family, goes to night school after work to pursue further studies and does not frequent cafes. She runs into the wealthy Xu Shaoming in a rubber cutting factory, and they finally fall in love and marry. The film also shows Feng Ling's second elder brother Zhixiong reforming his "bad habits" of hanging out in bars, resolutely dumping the barmaid who is in love with him and marrying the innocent girl next door. Here, Yi Shui's left-wing moral judgement merges with the Anti-Pornography Movement vigorously promoted by the governing party.[8] Yi Shui believed that the Anti-Pornography Movement was better described as Malaya's "cultural reform": or, even better, a "cultural revolution" (Yi 1959, 35).

Leftist groups in Singapore's Chinese community were especially active in the Anti-Pornography Movement between 1953 and 1956 (Fang 1978, 105). For example, the *New Paper* of 21 July 1956 dedicated a page to this "movement to oppose pornographic culture and nurture a healthy and progressive culture." The report believed that pornographic culture was inseparable from colonial control and that it was protected by the colonizers in poetry, music, art, film, and dance. Pornographic culture caused people to lose their way and anaesthetized the lower classes; in order to obtain independence, the binds of pornographic culture had to be cast off (Anon. 1956b). Third World leftist groups used the debates on the "Anti-Pornographic Culture Movement" and Chinese-language education to attack the colonial government.

After the PAP took power, they vigorously promoted the Anti-Pornography Movement, but inhibited the development of Chinese-language education. The PAP used these debates to successfully divide and disperse the power and attention of the Chinese community, finally succeeding in absorbing many mild leftist intellectuals, such as Yi Shui, into their institutions of control. Yi Shui's situation fits Armes' description of post-Second World War Third World intellectuals, including film workers:

> even if they are driven to oppose the political and social policies of the ruling elite, they cannot cease to be a part of it, through either shared origins or achieved social status……whether as politicians and intellectuals, organizers and administrators, or as writers, artists, and film makers, [they] are inevitably closer to the rulers (Armes 1987, 24)

However, Yi Shui did not swallow the PAP's ideology whole. In particular, in the debate on Chinese language, he expressed his subtle "multiple Chinese languages" standpoint through

language used in *Lion City*. In the scene in which the cafes are shut down by the police, the police commander addresses the Chinese owner in the "national language" (Malay) first:

> Police commander: (in Malay) Encik Ong! (in Cantonese) Can you speak *guoyu*?
> Owner: (in Cantonese) I can speak Cantonese.
> Police commander: (in Cantonese) By order of the government, all pinball machines must be closed down. [9]

The *guoyu* (national language) the police commander speaks of is Malay, not Mandarin.[10] This is evident from his initial use of Malay to address the owner. In addition, the commander subsequently issues the order to the accompanying Indian patrol officer to shut the place down in Malay; the notice of closure affixed to the cafe is also in Malay. The legal "national language" loses its effect here, as at that time most people of Chinese ancestry could not understand Malay, and the police commander could only communicate with him in Cantonese. This hints that the government's heavily promoted "national language week" was not having any effect. That the director had the police officer communicate with residents in Cantonese and not Mandarin puts Yi Shui's ideal of "multiple Chinese languages" into practice while also representing a feature of urban life in Singapore in the 1950s and 1960s. This is an advance indication of his cultural resistance to the PAP's subsequent English policy and "Speak Mandarin more and dialects less" policy. When the police stick the notice of closure, written in the "national language," on the cafe wall, a tense extra-diegetic sound envelops the scene, indicating an unknown future. This extra-diegetic sound implies a strong contrast with the previous loud playing of the PAP victory song on the radio. As a mild Third World leftist intellectual, Yi Shui did not dare to express his nameless fears about the future of Singapore through on-screen text or language, and was only able to do so implicitly, through the language of film and extra-diegetic sound.

The film did not only show Chinese society and culture. While it has been criticized for being an expression of Chinese chauvinism and not featuring any Malays (Hamzah 1997, 79), this criticism is in fact baseless: the rich young man Xu Shaoming held a party to which he invited a wide range of friends from all ethnicities, with musical performances from all ethnic groups. Indeed the Chinese language song *Paean to the Sea* (*Hai Song*) uses a Malay melody: the writer was a Malay person called Wandy Mazid (Yi 1960b). The first guests introduced by

Xu Shaoming to Feng Ling are a Malay couple dressed in traditional Malay clothing; he makes the private introduction in fluent Malay.

It is possible that this controversy arose because Yi Shui did not centre the film on Malay culture, but rather focused on Chinese culture. For example, at this party with Malays, Indians, and Bengalis in attendance, Xu Shaoming only makes an address in Chinese when introducing the Chinese singer and piano player despite being fluent in other languages. The dance also showcases music from different ethnicities, but this is mostly used by Yi Shui as a musical background; the theme tune of the dance is a Chinese song. Looked at from one perspective, this is a political stance taken by Yi Shui in the fierce political struggle to have Mandarin installed as an official language; it fully displays Xu Shaoming's cultural confidence in the language. In this film, the Chinese language attempts to transcend the binary oppositions of "rich and poor" in class politics and "Malays vs. Chinese" in ethnic politics. In the film, as a primary language of communication it knits together romances, represents political and identity recognition, and expresses a modern imagining of globalism.

It is also worth noting that the film only represents a few white people. They flash by, indulging themselves in decadent bars, indicating that they are the main target of the Anti-Pornography Movement. Yi Shui clearly wants to use the language of these scenes to show that this is already a "Singapore that is moving from colonialism to self-government" as the *Lion City* advert claimed (Anon 1960b); white people have been removed from power. Yi Shui's unstated motivation in handling the scenes in this way is the "Malayanized" nationalism of Third World politics.

Back then, when Lee Kuan Yew saw this passionate promotion of "Malayanized Chinese-language cinema" from his VIP seat, was he secretly appreciative? Or was he unsure of how to react? Actually, Lee Kuan Yew was not a consistent supporter of the "Malayanization" policy. For him, "Malayanization" was just a political bargaining chip for him to join with other parties in demanding Singaporean independence or federation with Malaya from the British colonial government.[11] As soon as the British agreed to the independence of Malaya, he felt that it was not practical to continue implementing this policy. This can be seen from the U-turn he performed within six years in the controversy over whether or not to Malayanize the Singapore Harbour Bureau. In the mid-1950s, Lee Kuan Yew promoted Malayanization: "The government's Malayanization policy is not only implemented in government departments, but

also in all public service institutions, especially the Harbour Bureau." [12]At the time, many of the high-ranking employees in the Harbour Bureau were white, and his radical promotion of Malayanization was equivalent to a wish to chase these white people out of the Harbour Bureau. When Singapore moved towards self-government, Lee Kuan Yew took the reins of power in 1959. In a speech to the Legislative Assembly on the 11th of August 1960, he viciously mocked those who continued to promote the slogan of "Malayanization": "Only those present-day geniuses totally ignorant of politics are still calling out the old slogan of 'down with white officials- Malayanization'" (Anon 1963). Yi Shui's *Lion City* was screened after Lee Kuan Yew's speech, in the same year. Yi Shui was probably the type of person who according to Lee Kuan Yew was "totally ignorant of politics" and who continued to shout out "old slogans."

Although *Lion City* seemed to be "correct" politically, it did not please those in power. After finishing *Lion City*, Yi Shui's Malayanized Chinese-language cinema did not continue to receive the direct support of Cathay Productions. Yi Shui had no option but to form an independent production company, Era Moriz Co, Ltd, to continue putting his Malayanized Chinese-language cinema into practice with *Black Gold*. Yi Shui himself claimed that this was an "independent film production, shot in an independent film studio" (Yi 1963). However, he had not formally left Cathay Productions at this point. Although *Black Gold* was distributed by the Cathay Productions distributor International Films, Yi Shui had more autonomy with this film, and tried to cast off the ideological constraints on the film's themes imposed by Cathay Productions in order to develop his Third World Malayanized Chinese-language cinema.

The editing of *Black Gold* was completed by November 1962. While the lead actors were the same as *Lion City*, the setting moved from Singapore to the Malay tin mines. The poster for the film announced its theme: "A story of the blood and tears of the Malay people; an indictment of war crimes" (Tian 1963, back cover). As seen above, Yi Shui had accused British film companies of attempting to cover up the persecution of Chinese people when Japan invaded Malaya. *Black Gold* achieves Yi Shui's goal of reversing the historical judgment of this period. The use of film by Overseas Chinese to condemn Japanese military violence dates back to the first post-war self-made Singaporean film *The Bloody Tears of Overseas Chinese* (*Huaqiao Xuelei*) and the first self-made Chinese documentary *Light of Malaya* (*Malaiya Zhi Guang*). Yi Shui did not continue the documentary style treatment of Japanese military violence seen in these two films. Instead, he made a melodrama, using a narrative format that fused music and drama.

In the film, there are three families suffering in the black cloud left behind by Japanese military abuses. The first of these is made up of the two brothers Chen Yan and Chen Lin. Chen Lin's lower body was severely beaten by Japanese troops in the war, leaving him with erectile dysfunction. His wife is lonely, and so has an affair with another man by the tin-mining pools. In his rage, Chen Lin accidentally pushes his wife into a tin-mining pool, where she drowns. He loses his mind, and eventually dies in an accident. The next family is that of Jin Hua. Her father disappeared in the war, and the collaborator Jiang Tiancai seduces her mother, becoming her stepfather. He later attempts to rape Jin Hua, but Jin Hua kills him with an iron instead. She is arrested, but the judge finds her not guilty. She and Chen Yan marry. Finally, there is the neighbour, Ms Fusheng. She has gone mad because her son was murdered by Japanese troops, and appears like a spirit around the tin-mining pools at dusk, cursing the Japanese to the sinking sun and the moon. She also witnessed Chen Lin accidentally pushing his wife into the tin-mining pool.

The conflict in the film is built on the melodramatic opposition of good and evil characters and a clear divide between good and evil. Evil characters such as Jiang Tiancai are killed in the end, while good character Jin Hua is finally allowed to flourish. It is evident that "the polarization of good and evil works toward revealing their presence and operation as real forces in the world" (Brooks 1985, 13). The pain and worries of the main characters in melodramas often originate from the external world. These three tragic families prove that "this is a place of torment, where creatures of prey perpetually thrust their claws into the quivering flesh of the doomed" (5). The damage done to them by the war decided their fates for the rest of their lives. The first two family tragedies are both related to sex. Sex is unable to soothe the pain of broken families, instead accelerating the onset of tragedy. Only the pure romance of Jin Hua and Chen Yan, like that of Feng Ling and Xu Shaoming in *Lion City*, attracts envy and well-wishes from all.

The melodrama format of *Black Gold* and its depiction of working class life undoubtedly corresponds to the embryonic form of Third World cinema: the 1930s' Chinese left-wing films which borrowed the style of Hollywood films. The tag for the film on the poster said "Singing folk songs, it has ethnic character! Washing dulang, it has the taste of home" (Tian 1963, back cover). As many Hakka people were employed by the British to work in Malaya's tin-mining pools, Yi Shui wrote three Hakka folk songs (*Kejia Shangge*) for the workers in the film. These

are entitled *Washing Dulang* (*Xi Liulang*), *Tin Mining Pool Folk Song* (*Folang Shangge*), and *Fishing Ditty* (*Diaoyu Xiao Chang*). *Washing Dulang* tells of the hard labour done by Hakka workers in the tin-mining pools: "Hands tired with washing, legs sore with standing, washing from dawn till dusk, warmth is hard to come by" (Tian 1963, 29). The passionate love song *Tin Mining Pool Folk Song* sings of Hakka couples finding joy in the midst of hardship: "Courting is like washing tin ore! There's light, there's heat, there's heart!" (30) *Fishing Ditty* is a light ditty, telling of a Hakka couple who steal away and sing to each other by the tin-mining pools. Yi Shui believed that Hakka folk songs are the type of Chinese folk literature most able to express ethnic identity. They were born of the natural environment and people's lives. The perfection of the form and the richness of the lyrics make it a representative of Chinese folk literature (Yi 1963)

Singing the folk songs in Hakka puts Yi Shui's ideal of "multiple Chinese languages" into practice. He thought that: "although Hakka and Mandarin are not easy to distinguish when sung, I still believe that there is a difference in meaning and mood" (Yi 1963).

Yi Shui chose to employ the format of folk songs in Hakka, not Mandarin or Malay, to express the romantic life of young men and women in the tin mines while also telling of the hard labour the Hakka workers undertook. Yi Shui himself asked, "But can this form be called Malayanization?" He then explained that these Hakka songs should also be seen as Malayanized works, saying that "Malayanized works are not a derivative or subsidiary culture. It should be a new culture that evolves from the combination, penetration, and absorption of the preserved culture of all ethnicities" (Yi 1963). This shows that for Yi Shui, Malayanization is a pluralistic, not singular, nationalism. He would probably not have agreed with the later Chinese assimilation policies advocated by singular Malay nationalists.

Not long after *Black Gold* was screened, Yi Shui announced he was leaving Cathay Productions and making two new films: *The Moon on Bentong Hill* (*Wendong Shan De Yueliang*) and *Little Widow* (*Xiao GuoFu*). These films were made under the banner of Malaya Films and Investments, Ltd. This company had "bought 10 acres of land to build the base for a domestic film city" (Tian 1963, 33) in Klang, Malaya. Advertising slogans promoted this film company:

> …truly belonging to the people, and characterizing film as a form of amusement for the people of today, related to cultural and educational development. Therefore, it should not be controlled, monopolized, and utilized as an instrument for profit.

> This company was the only film production company purely owned by the people in Malaya. Not only was its capital raised solely through people purchasing shares, the directors were also all selected according to shareholder wishes. They were all passionate and famous people who could devote themselves to the country's film culture. (Tian 1963, 33)

Although the film copies of both *The Moon on Bentong Hill* and *Little Widow* have been lost, it is evident from the advertising that Yi Shui and a group of local Singaporean and Malaysian film workers raised funds to start a private film company in order to cast off the control over Third World cinema wielded by First World cinematic hegemony. They also swore that they "hoped to make do with the minimum conditions and achieve our lofty ideals by working from the ground up" (Tian 1963, 33). Yi Shui's Third Cinema ideal is laid bare here for all to see. Although this is an ideal that would never be completed, remaining in an "imperfect" state, Yi Shui's promotion and pioneering of Malayanized Chinese-language cinema has left a valuable historical record for Third World Malayan cinema culture.

Conclusion

There was much contemporary newspaper discussion on the successes and failures of Yi Shui's Malayanized Chinese-language cinema. Looked at purely in terms of box office value, *Lion City*'s results were especially impressive. It was screened for ten days in four cinemas in Singapore and nine days in two cinemas in Kuala Lumpur and one in Ipoh. The reaction to *Black Gold* was similar to that to *Lion City*, with a mix of praise and criticism. However, even though Yi Shui's Malayanized Chinese-language cinema practice was flawed in many aspects, he had forged a way through the fog of history in the midst of linguistic and political conflict for those that came after him. He personally witnessed and practiced the naming of a generation of "Chinese-language cinema" in the Third World. In the exploration of cultural transmission and the construction of history, his "multiple Chinese languages" scheme and fusion of Mandarin and regional dialects gave Chinese-language cinema a broader linguistic character, enabling Chinese people in the worlds of cinema and academia across the globe to cooperate under the common name of "Chinese-language cinema." Hong Kong Cantonese films, Taiwanese films, Chinese

films from Mainland China, ethnic minority films, and the Sinophone Cinemas (including contemporary Singaporean and Malaysian Chinese-language film) widely debated in Anglo-American academic circles in recent years can attempt to transcend the misunderstandings engendered by national boundaries, linguistic differences, and political ideologies to continue to carry out dialogue and exploration on the platform of pan-Chinese culture.

Notes

[1] When the term "Chinese-language cinema" is used in this paper, it is equivalent to the Chinese "*huayu dianying*."

[2] As Sheldon H. Lu pointed out, "It was Emilie Yueh-Yu Yeh and I who introduced the concept 'Chinese-language film', and theorized it and made it mainstream within English language circles" (Li 2010, 248).

[3] I conducted an interview with Prof. Sheldon H.Lu in the latter half of 2016 and provided him with the evidence that the idea of "Chinese-language film" originated from the Chinese books and periodicals in 1950's Singapore and Malaya. He accepted it and claimed in the interview that it should be widely recognized as a fact. The interview will be published in the *Journal of Shanghai University(Social Science Edition)* in May of 2017.

[4] Yi Shui's original name was Tang Pek Chee (*Tang Bo Qi*). He was born in Perak state in Malaya. He spent his life moving around Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand, and was a Singaporean citizen. He died in Thailand (Ma 1991, 401-402). From a copy of a company contract with Yi Shui's signature on it, I have been able to verify that he spelled his name Tang Pek Chee, and not Tang Pak Chee (Mak 2009, 154) or Thung Pak Chee (Hamzah 1997, 79). The name of this company contract signed by Yi Shui is *Memorandum and Articles of Association of Era Movie Company*. Many thanks to Yi Shui's daughter Joo Lan Berry for providing me with a copy of this contract.

[5] Yang Hai-li, who once worked as set designer for Lianhua Film Company, was hired to take charge of art for Yi Shui's *The Lion City* (Yi 1960b, 17).

[6] Therefore, "Third World Cinema" is not equal to "Third Film," but it can include Third Film, Cinema of Discovery, Cinema Novo, and Imperfect Cinema.

[7] Throughout its history, Cathay Productions has always mainly made Malay films. At the time the cost of producing a Malay film was only around $30,000, yet many Malay films made a loss when screened. The new manager of Cathay Productions Tom Hodge supported Yi Shui's filming of *The Lion City* in order to diversify film production as he believed that there was a larger market for Chinese-language films. This film was more expensive than Malay films, and this apparently caused widespread complaints among Malay workers (Barnard 2009, 66-67; Hamzah 1997, 79-80).

[8] In western political discourse, this type of moral judgment would be perceived as being right-wing, but it was perceived as left-wing in a Chinese context.

[9] Dialogue transcribed from *Lion City* by the author.

[10] Some critics believe that *guoyu* (national language) means "Mandarin" here (Mak 2009, 202). I believe that this utterance must be considered in its historical context. After the PAP took power, they began to copy the Malayan government's implementation of a "national language week" in January 1960 in order to push forward the plan for the merger of Singapore and Malaya. *Lion City*, which took nearly a year to make, was formally screened on the 7 December 1960; the film was being made during the time in which "national language week" was being promoted most energetically. Therefore, the *guoyu* in the film is Malay.

[11] The *New Paper* of March 8 1956 reported that the "Malayanization Committee" proposed the "Malayanization Report" in the Legislative Assembly. This required that the Malayanization of civil officials be completed within two years. Within this time, those foreign officials acting as public servants for the colonial government needed only to swear that Malaya was their permanent home to be allowed to stay in office. Otherwise, they would have to leave (Anon 1956d).

[12] This is a record from Lee Kuan Yew's speech to the Legislative Assembly on the 26 April 1955 (as quoted in Anon 1963).

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Special terms

dianxing 典型

Dianying Zhoubao 電影周報

Diaoyu Xiao Chang 釣魚小唱

EnQing Shen Si Hai 恩情深似海

Fengyu Niu Che Shui 風雨牛車水

Folang Shangge 佛瑯山歌

guanhua 官話

guo pian 國片

guochan dianying 國產電影

guoyu pian 國語片

guoyu 國語

Hai Song 海頌

Hai Xin 海星

Hanyu 漢語

Heijin 黑金

Huaqiao Xuelei 華僑血淚

huayu dianying 華語電影

huayu pian 華語片

huayu zhong de XX pian 華語中的 XX 片

huayu zhong de yue pian 華語中的粵語片

Huayu 華語

Kejia Shangge 客家山歌

Malaiya Zhi Guang 馬來亞之光

Man Wu Luo 曼舞羅

Nanda Chengli Dianli 南大成立典禮

Pincheng Yan 檳城艷

putonghua 普通話

Shi Zi Cheng 獅子城

Tang Bo Qi 湯伯器

tiyan shenghuo 體驗生活

Wendong Shan De Yueliang 文冬山的月亮

WoMen De BuZhang 我們的部長

Xi Liulang 洗琉瑯

Xiao GuoFu 小寡婦

Xiao Xian Zhong 消閑鐘

Xin bao 新報

Xingfu Zi Men 幸福之門

Yang Hai-li 楊海立

YaoYuan Ji Xiangsi 遙遠寄相思

Yu Le 娛樂

yue pian 粵片

zhenshi 真實

zhongguo yu 中國語