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**The Cultural Politics of In/Visibility: Contesting 'British Chineseness' in the Arts**

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Discourses of British-Chineseness emerged in the late 1980s under the aegis of multiculturalism. Yet, if the 1980s is commonly cited as decade of 'black cultural renaissance' in Britain, the 1990s was the decade in which a new generation of artists of Chinese descent emerged on the British cultural landscape, across the visual arts, theatre and performing arts, music and film. This burst of activity in the 1990s arguably marks a 'conjunctural shift' (Hall 2005) in the practices of British-based 'Chinese' artists, and another blossoming of creative activity is underway as we approach the second decade of the twenty-first century. However, as I wrote in 2000, debates around the transformation of meanings of English and British identity by the cultural practices of artists of African-Caribbean and Asian descent have usually excluded the Chinese (Yeh 2000). Although almost twenty years have passed, and research has begun to emerge, there has yet to be widespread acknowledgement of the extraordinary diversity of cultural practitioners ascribed as 'Chinese' in Britain. Instead, the 'British Chinese' are still often seen as 'an invisible model minority', who do not go into the arts. Indeed, even the term 'British Chinese' remains under-theorised and frequently used to refer to a purportedly self-evident, taken-for-granted 'ethnic community', as if the construction of its boundaries is unproblematic.

In this chapter, I advance work on 'British Chinese culture', first, by examining the specific positioning of 'Chinese' as a category constructed in relation to 'British', 'black' and 'Asian'; and second, by mapping out contestations both within and beyond the categorizations 'Chinese' and 'British-Chinese', including in relation to China and East and Southesast Asian diasporas. In doing so, I contest the invisibility of 'Chinese' cultural practices in Britain in terms of physical or material absence. What this means is that rather than being subject to a literal invisibility (though this certainly also occurs), 'British Chinese' cultural practices can, to cite Salman Rushdie (1988), be 'visible but unseen', present in the social and cultural fabric but rendered invisible within the social and cultural imagination. By examining the way this invisibility occurs as a part of broader categorization processes, I conceptualise it as

connected to a specific form of racialization experienced by those perceived to fall into the category ‘Chinese’, which, as I discuss later, includes East and Southeast Asians more widely.

A focus on racialization (Murji and Solomos 2005) directs attention to the state’s role in the production of racial difference, and the contradictory ways in which it works both to prevent racism and produce the conditions in which it flourishes. Where ‘culture’ is used as a political and administrative resource, cultural policies have the capacity to legitimise the status quo, thereby perpetuating rather than addressing inequality (Osborne 2006). In the arts, ethnic and racial classification shapes access to visibility, funding and employment; impacts upon the agency and autonomy of creative practitioners and affects the works they produce; and has psychosocial effects and implications for politics. Thus, it is necessary to differentiate between terms adopted by groups to symbolize identity and resistance and the appropriations of the same terms by state-subsided organisations in formulating policies and allocating resources (Brah 2009). This chapter attends to the complex positioning of ‘British Chinese’ in relation to ‘British’, ‘Black’ and ‘Asian’ and its consequences. I argue that a genealogical mapping of constructions and contestations of these categories illuminates the key role played by the state in the formation of ‘Chinese’ as racial difference and its invisibility. However, racialized minorities are not, to quote Gilroy (1987/1992), “reducible to the disabling effects of racial subordination” (203). While arguing for the significance of an analysis of racialization processes, I position the “British Chinese” as social, cultural, and political agents rather than “victims” and highlight not only their creative but also their political agency in contesting “British Chineseness,” in negotiating demands for racial difference, and in tactical formations of “community” to contest invisibility and marginalization.

I first examine the discourse of the British Chinese cultural invisibility as a part of racialization processes, addressing the question of hierarchies of racial marginalisation and oppression and challenging the widespread assumption that there has been little cultural activity among the Chinese in Britain. I then examine how the precarious positioning of ‘Chinese’ within the categories ‘British’, ‘black’ and ‘Asian’ in UK discourse, policy and cultural practice contributes to rendering ‘British Chinese’ cultural practice unseen. In the third section, I discuss the emergence of

discourses of ‘British Chinese’ culture, examining how the self-ascribed identity among artists, drawn on to organise collective action and combat structural marginalization in a cultural politics of visibility, became co-opted by cultural organisations in the context of neoliberal multiculturalism and the rise of China. While mapping out the contestations over British Chineseness that arose in relation to access to representation, due to space constraints, my analysis reflects the focus of debates on the ground where differences in ethnicity, subethnicity, relation to empire, language, and migration trajectories usually took precedence over other critical divisions of gender, class, and sexuality. The latter were dealt with more extensively in cultural productions, which I have examined in greater detail elsewhere (Yeh 2000, 2014a, b, c) and which are also attended to in other chapters in this volume. In the final section, I examine how the categories of ‘Chinese’ and ‘British Chinese’, while extremely marginalised, have nonetheless been hegemonic over other identities, rendering invisible others, but also leading to mobilization around alternative categories, such as the contentious term ‘Oriental’ and ‘British East Asian’ as more inclusive categories that engage a wider politics of visibility.

The chapter draws on four periods of funded and unfunded fieldwork undertaken from 1998 to the present day.[1] I do not seek to provide a comprehensive account of the cultural practitioners, debates or contestations over this period and make no attempt to address actual cultural productions in this chapter, as I do elsewhere. Rather, my aim is to map out some of the key moments, challenges and trends in the process of coming to visibility of ‘British Chinese’ and ‘East and Southeast Asian’ culture more widely in Britain. In doing so, I contribute to debates around race and multiculture by examining how the specific positioning of ‘Chinese’ and ‘British Chinese’ in relation to other groups enriches our understandings of how the broader racial landscape works.

**Invisibility and the Racialization of ‘Chinese’ in Britain**

[1] On emerging visual artists of Chinese descent in Britain (1998–1999); on British-Chinese theatre, literature and art (2004–2007), funded by the University of East London and the Great Britain China Cultural Centre; on the British East Asian night-time economy (2010–12); and on British East Asian actors (2016–) funded by City, University of London.

In a 2013 conference, Julia Lovell, a modern Chinese history and literature scholar raised the question of whether anti-Chinese sentiment is worse than that directed towards other racial minorities.[2] The response, in the affirmative, from a mix of academics and the wider audience, was unanimous. The conference, *Fu Manchu in London*, examined the pervasiveness of 'Yellow Peril' stereotypes in literature and culture in the twenty-first century, and this was the context for the claim. Nonetheless, assertions of the exceptionalism of racism directed towards the Chinese, measured on the basis of representations in the cultural realm, are untenable and troubling as they erase wider forms of racism and racial violence that mark the everyday lives of differently racialized groups. Yet, what they also do is capture the keenly felt and very real erasures and inequalities endured by those racialized as Chinese within the realm of culture and beyond, which are compounded by the way in which these are rarely, if ever, acknowledged, let alone recognized as consequences of racism or forms of racial oppression.

Rather than constructing a hierarchy of oppression however, I argue that we need to explore the specific ways in which different groups become racialized at particular moments and how different racial positionings as 'Black', 'White, 'Asian' and 'Chinese' are often mutually constitutive. Racial hierarchies are not only politically divisive, but are unable to account for this complexity and fluidity (Kim 1999, 2004) or the significance of intersectionality, which complicates unidimensional understandings of inequality. Although race, gender and class are usually privileged as the key social divisions, the analysis in this chapter highlights the centrality of differences in positioning in relation to empire, ethnicity, cultural and linguistic resources and migration trajectories that have dominated debates on British Chinese access to representation. Racial hierarchies are also limited by the difficulty of accounting for different indicators of disadvantage across every realm of social life, so it is apt that the playwright and actor Daniel York (2014) argues that Chinese and other East Asians are at the bottom of the 'racial pecking order' in terms of cultural representation specifically. What I argue is that the invisibility of 'British Chinese' culture is part of a specific contemporary racialization process that draws on longstanding racial ideas of the Chinese as a 'model minority' minority"—an

[2] *Fu Manchu in London: Lao She, Limehouse and Yellow Peil in the Heart of Empire*, conference, University of Westminster, London 2013.

immigrant success story, due to perceived self-sufficiency and success in business, education, and employment, but lacking in creativity. This is constructed in contradistinction to other groups, who, perceived as 'problems' or 'victims', have been rendered more visible. Characterization as an 'invisible model minority' is not peculiar to the Chinese and has also been applied to South Asians by comparison to African-Caribbeans, showing how racialized discourses can be mapped across boundaries (Alexander 2009). However, it is also the case that the hegemony of the terms 'Black' and 'Asian' in current racial discourse signals an absence that has not yet been adequately theorized. The positionings of 'British', 'Black', 'Asian' and 'Chinese' are significantly shaped by the politics of the British empire and the way its legacies have framed migration histories and integration policies. The invisibility of 'British Chinese' culture is also entwined, however, with contemporary geopolitical concerns and the changing role of China on the global stage.

The 'Chinese' in Britain are rendered invisible in discussions of multiculture, partly due to their ambivalent place in the racial hierarchy and the politics of the British Empire, since while Hong Kong was a colony, in China, the empire operated only informally in treaty ports (Bickers 1999). This fact also accounts for the construction of the Chinese as more culturally alien than other groups with stronger colonial histories. The significance of this colonial legacy in shaping contemporary racial politics is evident in the Commission for Racial Equality documentation (1985), in which immigrants from Hong Kong, even if White businessmen, were classified as 'Black/brown', while those from China were considered 'White' (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992). Further, in Britain the hegemonic discourse of race and legislation, focusing on 'Commonwealth immigrants', has failed to encompass the range of racisms experienced by those falling outside this category, and the Chinese, alongside Gypsies, the Irish, Jews and Arabs, and others, have usually been excluded (Yuval-Davis 1999). It is also significant that in 2001, the census for England and Wales had the category 'Chinese or other ethnic group'. Over half the latter were born in what continued to be called 'the Far East', despite this term's colonialist and Orientalist connotations, in particular the Philippines (15 per cent), Japan (15 per cent), Thailand (5 per cent) and Vietnam (5 per cent) (Gardener and Connolly 2005). This vividly demonstrates how 'Chinese' has thus functioned not to refer to ethnicity (e.g. shared culture and language), but rather as a racial category based on phenotype. The

consequences of this is that ‘Chinese’ becomes hegemonic over – and simultaneously incorporates and erases – other East and Southeast Asian ethnicities.

The different positionings of racialized minorities are also affected by their migration histories, which are again shaped by colonialism. Due to Britain’s colonial relations, the migrations of the Chinese in the 1950and 1960s were predominantly from Hong Kong. Thus, the ‘Chinese’ constitute one of the smallest of the main, categorized visible minorities in terms of ethnicity (0.7% of the population in 2011, though when combined with other East and Southeast Asian groups, is also one of the largest and fastest growing minorities) (ONS 2011)). Further, migration via the catering trade meant that unlike African-Caribbeans, the Chinese predominantly entered Britain via the private market, where as Chau and Yu (2001: 119) have argued, their status is ‘more as a commodity than as a citizen’. Concentration in takeaway businesses has also led to the Chinese being the most scattered of any racial/ethnic group including ‘White’ in Britain. Both factors have contributed to a sense of isolation and invisibility as well as restricting opportunities for political organisation and the desirability of highly visible protest that might jeopardise livelihoods and the strategically significant if problematic image of a ‘model minority’.

As I have written elsewhere, the construction of the ‘British Chinese’ as a model minority is contemporary form of racialization (Yeh 2014a). It works in conjunction with the construction of ‘blacks’ and, since 9/11 and the resurgence of Islamophobia, ‘Asians’ as both archetypal ‘problems’ and ‘victims’. Within this racialised narrative, the Chinese in Britain are constructed as a success story due to relative success in education and employment, but their invisibility in the political and cultural realm is erased as a concern, as is the racial violence and discrimination towards them. (Song 2004; Yeh 2014a). Further, their purported achievements are used to delegitimize claims of structural disadvantage, such that the comparative performances of other groups, especially African Caribbeans, are constructed as ‘cultural’ deficits. Like all racialized minorities, the ‘British Chinese’ are rendered both invisible as social, cultural and political agents and hypervisible as stereotypes, the latter another means of being rendered invisible and unseen. The way in which and the extent to which this in/visibility is gendered differs across the arts and cultural industries. Female visual artists, for example, have argued for recognition of the way in which gender intersects

with race to further contribute to their marginalization (Hansen 1998). Meanwhile, those in the acting profession have contested the severely limited and highly gendered roles they are offered: for men, brutish gang masters, desexualized nerds, or one-dimensional kung fu experts; or for women, exotic, sexualized vamps or submissive "lotus flowers" (Cheung-Inhin 2015). That continuing structural disadvantage affects all racialized minorities in the creative and cultural industries is evidenced by recent statistics which show that employment of minorities in the cultural sector is at its lowest since records began (Creative Skillset 2012). However, the comparative visibility of black British and British Asians in British culture – however partial and problematic, diverts attention away from the invisibility of East and Southeast Asians.

Indeed, this cultural invisibility is inseparable from contemporary racialization as a 'model minority', a colonial discourse which revives longstanding ideas of docility and racialized explanations of economic success arising from a supposed 'steady but *uncreative* drive towards material prosperity' (Parker 2000: 76, my italics) that made 'the Chinese' so desirable as indentured labour (Yeh 2014a). The 'invisibility' of the 'Chinese' in British culture is assumed to stem from a lack of presence that is *cultural* – there is, in other words, a racialized assumption that the 'British Chinese', who are 'too busy making money', do not go into the arts. Within a multiculturalist framework, this 'invisibility' is further entrenched via essentialist preconceptions of what that culture might be, that is, visibly and recognisably 'Chinese' or 'British Chinese' – which renders all other practices that do not conform to this expectation invisible (Yeh 2014a). For example, "British Chinese" DJs might be expected to draw on "Chinese" rap or Cantonese popular music rather than African American hip-hop or Korean pop, or face charges that their work is not sufficiently "authentic" or "really Chinese" (Yeh 2014a).

Within this context, discourses that repeatedly report the lack of 'British Chinese' in the arts and popular culture in Britain, without acknowledging existing cultural practitioners or their creative productions, work on a discursive level to reinforce their invisibility. This, in turn, has serious implications for work and employment, as the purported 'absence' of 'British Chinese' artists is continually used to justify both exclusions and practices such as yellowface casting ('as there are no Chinese actors') as well as shaping opportunities, narratives and curatorial strategies ('let's do a

Chinese survey show, as it's never been done before' [to paraphrase Tan, cited in Yeh 2000: 68]). Even if it is accepted that there are British Chinese artists, commentators, including practitioners ascribed as Chinese themselves and those who work closely with them, draw on culturalist explanations to account for their lack of visibility. In 2009, for example, in a discussion among curators who worked at the Chinese Art Centre, the question of the invisibility of Chinese artists when compared to black and Asian artists was attributed, albeit tentatively, to the idea that 'Chinese culture tends to look back' whereas 'black culture it's very contemporary' (Kwok 2009: 12). In another study, Saunders (2010) reported one of his interviewees arguing that 'the BBC [British-born Chinese] community not coming forward to establish their presence in terms of bidding for arts funding' could be explained by a 'cultural trait of deference to authority', leading him to wonder if the lack of Chinese in theatre is 'self-willed by the BBC's failure to assimilate'. Such explanations are damaging as they depend on racialized constructions of culture and identify the invisibility of the Chinese as a 'problem of culture'.

In fact, the presence of generations of artists across the creative and cultural industries belies this apparent absence and indicates rather the significance of structural inequalities in access to visibility and inclusion in narratives of Britain. Cultural activity by those ascribed as Chinese in Britain date back to at least the eighteenth century, when the Cantonese artist Chitqua, famed for his clay models, arrived in London in 1769 (Benton and Gomez 2008). Decades of artistic production since, including the highly visible worldwide hit *Lady Precious Stream* by Shih-I Hsiung in the 1930s, attended even by the Queen, have been erased from narratives of British cultural history (Yeh 2014b). However, during the 1990s a host of British Chinese artists began making a mark on national and international cultural landscapes. The explosion of artists working across literature and poetry, the visual arts, comedy, theatre, television, film, dance and popular music during this period[3] contests the

[3] Writers such as Kevin Wong, Peter Ho Davies and Timothy Mo were joined by others such as Jung Chang (1978) and Hong Ying (1991) from the People's Republic of China. Visual artists such as Qu Lei Lei, member of the Stars group, who arrived in 1985, were also joined by younger generations of mainland artists, such as Cai Yuan and Jian Jun Xi. In the visual arts, a host of practitioners graduated from British art schools, including Erika Tan, Anthony Key, susan pui san lok, Mayling To, Dinu Li, Gordon Cheung, Kwong Lee and Yuen Fong Ling to name but a few. Some also acted as curators alongside Sally Lai, Deborah Chan and Wing Fai Leung. Pui Fan Lee performed her one woman play *Short, Fat, Ugly and Chinese*

supposed absence of British Chinese cultural practitioners. Yet, as a 'British Chinese' artistic 'community' emerged, its boundaries were always already uncertain. Since the late 1970s, those born and educated in Britain were joined by others arriving via increased opportunities to migrate, travel, study abroad or undertake residences. Political events in mainland China, particularly Tiananmen, brought further artists to the UK. Many worked unstintingly to create support structures and networks, initiate and hold events, generate critical discourse and widen debates in order to improve working conditions for artists. They were, in other words, engaged in a cultural politics contesting dominant conceptions of 'the Chinese in Britain' as 'insular' and politically disengaged, and repositioning themselves as active agents of social, cultural and political change. As I discuss next, however, their access to visibility was shaped by a specific positioning as 'Chinese' within debates already dominated by a focus on 'black' and 'Asian' marginalisation.

**Not quite British? Black / Asian and the invisibility of 'Chinese'**

When in 1993, Laos-born, Paris-educated Vong Phaophanit was nominated for the Turner Prize, art critic Brian Sewell's response in the *Evening Standard* was, 'but I thought the Prize, according to the rules, was for a British artist?' (Sewell 1993). Meanwhile the Independent's response was to print what Phaophanit's long-term artistic collaborator would later characterize as a "chinky cartoon" on its title page (Oboussier1995). These are just two of the myriad of examples of how the boundaries

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on Radio 5 in 1992 and the writer, comedian and performer Anna Chen took her show *Suzy Wrong – Human Cannon* to the Edinburgh Fringe in 1994. In music, Simon Fung collaborated with Errol Reid to form reggae pop duo China Black, the name referencing their respective Chinese and Jamaican heritages, and which in 1995 produced a track that became the official England's World Cup rugby team song. In the late 1990s, Liz and Sarah Liew formed Chi2, a band blending Chinese instruments such as the erhu, the jinghu and liuqin with electric violins and beats. In dance, Malaysian-born Pit Fong Loh and Ming Low co-founded Bima Dance in 1991; while Taiwanese-born Jih-Wen Yeh set up Step Out Dance in 1995. In theatre, several companies emerged, British Chinese Theatre Company, Mulan, Yellow Earth and Tripitaka. In film, Rosa Fong, Lab Ky Mo, Raymond Yeung and Hong Khao and others had their work broadcast on 'In Focus: A celebration of British Chinese Film and Video' on Chinese News and Entertainment Satellite in 1999. In television, the longstanding veterans Jacqueline Chan, Sarah Lam, David Yip, Pik Sen Lim and Burt Kwouk were joined by Lucy Sheen, Daniel York, Paul Courtenay Hyu, Pui Fan Lee and Hi Ching. Po Chih-Leong's film *Ping Pong* (1986), was followed by writer Kevin Wong's *Peggy Su* in 1998 and Jane Wong's *Dimsum* in 2002.

of Britishness as limited to whiteness were articulated in public culture during the 1990s. While they provide evidence as Gilroy wrote that *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987), they also raise the question of whether equivalent responses could have been made in relation to Black or (South) Asian artists and, indeed, of the position of "Chinese," "East Asian," and "Southeast Asian" within formulations of "Black."

Since the intense period of identity politics of the 1970s and 1980s, alongside the shifts in debates from 'ethnic arts' in the 1970s, black arts in the 1980s; and cultural diversity in the 1990s–2000s, Arts Council England has implemented a series of strategies to manage what it continues to call 'Black and minority ethnic' arts (Arts Council England 2016). The emergence of a host of 'Chinese' cultural practitioners in the 1990s and 2000s occurred in climate different to the one that fostered the 'black cultural renaissance' in Britain in the 1980s. The 1990s was a decade in which neoliberalism emerged as triumphant and the culture industries concept increasingly undermined the link between cultural production and progressive social change (Hesmondhalgh 2008). A shift towards 'the cultural' in government discourses led ever increasingly to demands for equality being answered by 'celebrations' of 'the culture' of racialized minorities (Gilroy 1987), establishing an era of multicultural normalisation (Mercer 1999).

Following the murder of Stephen Lawrence and the MacPherson report (1999) into institutional racism, New Labour invested millions of pounds to support diversity in the arts. However its 'flirtations with multicultural democracy' were, as Back et al (2002) noted, 'combined with appeals to the remnants of racially exclusive nationalism and the phantoms of imperial greatness'. This was reflected not least in the 'young British artists' phenomenon. As Fisher (2009) argued:

> [T]he nationalist 'Cool Britannia' rhetoric that accompanied the institutional promotion of the yBas was symptomatic of a backlash against the politically inflected cosmopolitanism of the diasporas and an attempt to reassert an apolitical, if not overtly 'white' 'British' genealogy.

The Arts Council's promotion of diversity became part of the wider 'inclusive' society agenda where cultural policy was instrumentalised to combat social exclusion (Belfiore 2002). As Hylton (2007: 103) notes, while under Thatcher, the council had supported black arts under regular funding, under New Labour, it created a parallel structure to support diversity without 'compromising existing structures'. This was a regressive step, reminiscent of the early post-war period, in which artists from the Commonwealth were largely confined to exhibiting in the Commonwealth Institute.[4] Significantly, it abdicated publicly funded organisations from any serious engagement with racially minoritised artists and only helped a select few (Hylton 2007).

Opportunities for East and Southeast Asian cultural producers were occasionally available in venues such as Green Room (Manchester), Bluecoat (Liverpool), the ICA (London) and beyond. Glen Goei was nominated for the Oliver Awards for his performance in *M Butterfly* opposite Anthony Hopkins in 1989; Lesley Sanderson, , a Malaysian-born visual artist, of dual Chinese and British heritage, and Vong Phaophanit exhibited in the 'British Art Show' in 1990; Ivan Heng (director) and Ovidia Yu (writer) won an Edinburgh Fringe First for *The Woman in a Tree on a Hill* (1992); and Mulan's *Porcelain* (1992) won fringe awards. However, by and large opportunities beyond non-ethnic specific ventures were limited. Although some artists such as Mayling To voiced frustration at being advised to seek out institutions specifically supporting racialised minorities (Yeh 2000), others, such as Kwong Lee, wanted to work in contexts where the specificity of his cultural positioning would not be erased (Kwok 2009). What became clear was that in a context of normative white Britishness, 'Chinese', like 'Black' and 'Asian' artists and alongside all women, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning (LGBTQQ), and disabled artists, whether racialized as minorities or not, could, inhabit a viable 'universal' subject position from which to make culture. Many artists, such as Goei and Heng left the UK for opportunities elsewhere.

If 'Chinese' occupied a similar position to 'Black and 'Asian as 'the unspoken and invisible "other" to white aesthetic and cultural discourses' (Hall 1988: 27) however, the incorporation of 'Chinese' into the 'Black arts' paradigm was uneven. This

[4] Other venues included Gallery One and the New Vision Centre.

reflects the precarious position of the Chinese in British colonial and racial discourses discussed earlier, and the fragmentation of 'Black' identity and its appropriation within policy during the 1990s. The category 'Black' became an ethnicized category, in which the 'Black community' coexisted alongside the 'Asian community' and other 'minorities'. Rather than signifying political solidarity, Blackness became 'a system of power brokery … a divisive category in competing for … funds' (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992: 145). The increasing privileging of a depoliticised cultural difference was indicated by a move 'Towards cultural diversity' as a 1989 Arts Council's Report was named, which supposedly focused on 'African, Caribbean, Asian and Chinese arts' (Khan 2002). However, in reality, the Chinese were often overlooked. For example, in the 1998 Arts Council's *Cultural Diversity Action Plan*, only one of ten Regional Arts Boards – Southern Arts – explicitly mentioned 'Chinese' arts. Of the lottery-funded Arts Capital Programme in 2001, which took on twenty-three Black and Asian projects in its first spending round (Khan 2002), only one Chinese organization (the Chinese Arts Centre) received funding (£2.1 million of a total budget of £29 million). Similarly, the Arts Council's Black Arts Video Project (1988–1996) did not initially fund Chinese filmmakers (see Fong Chapter 10, this volume). Such erasures have meant that there is a widespread and long-standing perception that the "Chinese" are disregarded within cultural diversity policies.

Beyond policy, the Chinese 'voice' has also been described as 'alarmingly faint' (Hansen, 1998: 2), although the extent of this differed across the arts (see the chapters on film by Fong and Chan and Willis, this volume). In part, this is due to contestations over what constituted 'Black Art' during the 1980s when artists themselves played a pivotal role in initiating visibility. Some understood 'Black Art' as a racialized category, rooted in Pan-Africanism and referring to 'black experience'. Artists of Chinese and other Asian diasporas were thus automatically excluded. Others used 'Black art' in the wider political sense to include Asian diasporas, but all too often only included South Asians. This meant that 'Chinese' and other East and Southeast Asian artists have been excluded not only from visibility but also a powerful means of connecting to wider struggles. As Lesley Sanderson (2002), an artist included in some 'Black art' shows argued:

> Being labelled or named as Chinese, British, Black or Feminist infers respectful allegiances. These are vitally empowering speaking positions very necessary to redrawing the hierarchical structures which has historically privileged the patriarchal Western position.

However, in the visual arts, it is notable that Eddie Chambers, despite an Afrocentrism (Araeen and Chambers 1988), consistently worked with artists of Asian heritage, including Sanderson.[5] Also important is Rasheed Araeen's *The Other Story* (1989). Araeen's interpretation of Black art referred to work by 'Afro-Asian' artists arising out of the struggle of Asian, African and Caribbean people against racism and British imperialism (Araeen and Chambers 1988). Of a total of 24 artists, the inclusion of David Medalla (Philippines), Li Yuan-chia (China) and Kumiko Shimizu (Japan), who may have shared a similar position of 'Otherness' within the British art world, but whose migratory routes and works were not in fact connected to British colonial geographies, was somewhat paradoxical.[6] As Medalla once declared to me, differentiating his position from 'Commonwealth' artists, 'I had no illusions … the Philippines was never a colony of England'.[7] Fisher (2009) has since discussed these artists' inclusion in *The Other Story* in relation to 'internationalism', highlighting that, in fact, 'much of this history remained outside the exhibition's remit as it included a different constituency of artists.' Such projects have also sometimes been circumvented. Kim Lim, for example, like Anish Kapoor and others, declined to contribute to *The Other Story*, as to 'participate would be to self-consciously place myself in a position of otherness' (cited in Nasar 2015). Similarly, although Chinese artists were sometimes included in anthologies of 'Black' writing in literature and

[5] Chambers included Lesley Sanderson in *Black Art: Plotting the Course* (1988), as well as curating Sanderson's solo show *These Colours Run* (1994), (Vong) *Phaophanit and* (Keith) *Piper* (1995), *Some Kind of Black* (2000), which included Phaophanit, and South-African born artist of Chinese descent Anthony Key's solo show *Walcot Chapel* (2002).

[6] By focusing on resonances between practices, Medalla's and Li's works were discussed alongside those of Araeen himself and Syed Jawaed Iqbal Geoffrey, as sharing interest in the connection of art with life. Meanwhile Shimizu's work was discussed somewhat more incongruously alongside a range of artists under the theme of 'cultural metaphors'. For further discussion of the limitations of a postcolonial framework in relation to the work of Li Yuan-chia, see Yeh, D. (2014), 'Under the Spectre of Orientalism and Nation: Translocal Crossings and Discrepant Modernities', in M. Huang (ed.), *The Reception of Chinese Art across Cultures*, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing: 228–254.

[7] Medalla himself worked mainly with artists from Latin America, as well as Li Yuan-chia.

poetry,[8] marginalisations and erasures could occur. Jan Lowe Shinebourne and Meiling Jin, who both grew up as part of the Chinese diaspora in the Caribbean and moved to the UK, have generally been considered British Caribbean writers of Guyanese origin, with 'the Chinese element', as Misrahi-Barak (2012) argues, 'being (almost) erased (but not quite)'. Artists could, then, be rendered invisible by exclusion and non-participation but also by incorporation into broader narratives, in which they simply became another 'Other' or the specificity of their voice and positioning erased within hegemonic narratives of not only British imperialism, but also of 'Black' and Asian cultural production.

Perhaps the most contentious consequence of British colonial legacies and its shaping of the contemporary has, however, been the exclusion of 'Chinese' from 'Asian'. This underlines the racialization of UK discourse, where 'Asian' is understood as a racial rather than a geographical category that would transcend British colonial discourse. As actor and director Paul Courtenay Hyu (2004) has said,

> Forget China; lose Vietnam; sayonara Japan. And as for Cambodia, Laos, Tibet, Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines... where are they again? 'Asia', as far as the UK is concerned, is a much smaller place: India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Basically, if you play Test cricket, you get exclusive rights to the whole continent. Seems a tiny bit imperialistic to me.

Although the hegemony of 'black' over Asian experience has been recognized (Bakari 2000; Brah 2009), there is less acknowledgement of the impact of the exclusion of East and Southeast Asians from the category 'Asian'. For artists, this has been damaging in the context of the divisive, fracturing effect of state funding around ethnicity. In the performing arts, Chinese and other East and Southeast Asian

[8] Tang Lin, a member of the Manchester-based Black Arts Alliance, participated in anthologies such as *Kiss: Asian, African Caribbean and Chinese love poems* (1994) and *Healing Strategies for Women at War: Seven Black Women Poets* (1999) and exhibitions such as *Once Upon a Time: An Exhibition of Pictures and Words by Black Women Artists*, Rochdale Art Gallery (1989) and alongside Trinidadian-born John Lyons in *Vibrant Energies*, Chinese Arts Centre (1994). Meilin Jin published in *Watchers and Seekers: Creative Writing by Black Women in Britain* (Women's Press, 1987) and *Hurricane Hits England: An Anthology of Writing about Black Britain* (Bloomsbury, 2000).

practitioners were occasionally included in work by black and Asian companies during the 1990s, but with more frequent collaborations only occurring since the mid-2000s.[9] Thus, as Daniel York commented in an e-mail to me in 2017, 'It always struck me as problematic that there were theatre companies funded to create work that was "British Asian" but we were basically cut out of that. There was the odd exception – and Tamasha [theatre company] have certainly tried to change this in recent years with their "intra-cultural" approach – but the fact is "Asian" has never covered the whole of "Asia". Likewise, the BBC's "Asian Network".' Similarly, in the visual arts, East and Southeast Asian artists were usually excluded from UK-curated 'Asian' exhibitions, such as 000zerozerozero (Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1999). The colonial legacies of the boundaries of 'Asian' in Britain thus have implications for resources, visibility and livelihoods, as well as visceral psychosocial effects. While London-based Filipina Australian theatre-maker Jules Orcullo commented in a public debate in 2017 that the exclusion of East Asians from 'Asian' 'stabs me in the heart', Singapore-born actress Jennifer Lim in interview highlighted vividly to me the consequences of this racial discourse upon her, when she went for an audition for a 'multicultural' production of *Romeo and Juliet*, directed by John Sheehan, at the Birmingham Stage Company in 2002:

> I saw this sign saying 'Romeo and Juliet: Casting an Asian cast'. Fantastic, right, an Asian cast! I went in … [and said] 'I'd like to audition for the part of Juliet. I can do the "Gallop Apace" speech for you.' And the guy looked at me and said, 'Oh no, darling, you're not Asian.' I was like, 'Why am I not Asian?' 'You're Oriental'. So that stuck like a claw in my memory. I'll never forget that, that South Asians are allowed to be Asians but I'm an Oriental.

As this demonstrates, the exclusion and invisibility of 'Chinese' within 'black' as well as 'Asian' goes hand-in-hand with a specific form of racialization, as 'Oriental'. In

[9] Trinidad-born Jacqueline Chan played Alexis in 'Black-led touring theatre company' Talawa's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1991). David Tse played the male lead in Tara Arts's production of *Heer and Romeo* (1992). The writer Zindika's play *Leonora's Dance*, which included a key Chinese character Melissa Chung, was produced by the Black Theatre Collective in 1993, with Chung played by Japan-born Toshie Ogura. In 2003, Raymond Chai became Chief Ballet Master of Ballet Black. Tara Arts worked with Simon Wu and Rosaline Ting in 2008 as part of the China Now Festival; and Tamasha currently works with Amy Ng, Tuyen Do, and Rosaline Ting.

the US, the institutional use of this term has waned and it is more widely recognized as pejorative. In the UK, however, 'Oriental' is frequently used in popular and official discourse (Aspinall 2005; Schramm and Rottenburg 2012). Although it is not adopted in the UK censuses, the term 'Chinese', as previously discussed, functions instead as a racial category as a basis for organizing access to government resources, including arts funding, which I discuss next.

**'Chinese'/ 'British Chinese'**

In the 1980s, 'Chinese' arts organisations, such as the Chinese Cultural Centre (1986) and the Chinese Arts Centre in Manchester (1989) were established and received Arts Council funding. By the 1990s, as part of the strategy of separate development for racially minoritized artists, the Arts Council's Head of the Cultural Diversity Unit Peter Blackman also wanted to develop a national Chinese cross-arts organisation in London, and in 1992, the British Chinese Artists Association was formed.[10] The term 'British Chinese' sought to carve out a position in the light of the invisibility of British-based Chinese and other (South) East Asian practitioners within the 'black arts' and 'Chinese art' paradigm. Like the terms 'Black British' and 'British Asian', the emphasis on Britishness was crucial in claiming belonging to the national collectivity. The consequences of this new visibility were, however, mixed.

Over the 1990s, further 'Chinese' and 'British Chinese' organisations and support structures were established. Notably, Philippine-born arts worker Jessie Lim organised several ground-breaking initiatives across drama, literature and the visual arts, including some specifically for women to address gender discrimination in the arts.[11] The Liverpool-based *Brushstrokes: A Collection of British Chinese Writing*

[10] Initially run as an artists' network facilitating support and dialogue among practitioners via meetings and a newsletter, the BCAA's identity shifted over the years. While running workshops, community projects, exhibitions and seminars, BCAA also functioned as an information provider, holding an artists' database and liasing with 'mainstream' organisations. Subject to the divisive effects of limited funding and mismanagement, BCAA disappeared around 2004 after its Arts Council funding ended, though its 'Artists' Corner' meetings were revived under ACE's East Scheme.

[11] Lim co-organised drama workshops, which led to the publication 'Exploring our Chinese Identity' (1992) and co-edited the bilingual anthology of stories and poems, *Another Province: New Chinese Writing from London* (1994) with the poet Li Yan. She organised the

*and Drawing* edited by Graham Chan ran from 1995 to 2004 and the anthology *Dimsum (Little Pieces of Heart): British Chinese Short Stories* (1997) was published (Yeh 2008). Throughout the 2000s, arts organisations were launched, including Ricefield Arts (2004, Glasgow) and Chinatown Arts Space (2005, London). There were also conferences held to debate the place of 'Chinese', 'British Chinese' and 'East and 'Southeast Asian' and 'Pacific' culture in Britain and internationally.[12] Ethnic-specific support structures, however, remained controversial due to their potentially ghettoizing and homogenizing effects. In 1995, proposals to establish a permanent performance and exhibition space for South East Asian and Pacific Artists were debated at a meeting held at the Studio Theatre, with many artists arguing instead for focusing efforts on gaining access to major venues. During the New Vocabulary for Chinese Arts seminar, the Belfast-based film-maker Lab Ky Mo voiced a refusal to adopt a 'British Chinese' identification and make work focusing on ethnicity, saying 'This is a trap. How long must we do this before we move on?' (Hansen 1998). While Mo expressed concern over ghettoization as an "ethnic" artist, others responded that artistic subject matter should be down to individual choice, but that this was often denied to minority artists.

Further contestation grew over the meanings and boundaries of 'Chinese' and 'British Chinese'. Narratives of post-war Chinese migration to Britain tend to be dominated by the large-scale 1950s–60s Hong Kong migrations and the post-1980s migrations from mainland China. However, since their beginning, **t**he trajectories of Chinese Britons have been global, incorporating routes from not only Chinese-speaking territories and other countries in Asia but also, due to colonial labour, further afield, such as Mauritius, India, the Caribbean, South Africa and elsewhere. Thus, it is unsurprising that, as discussed elsewhere (Yeh 2000: 86), since 1998, even the Chinese Arts Centre has recognised that 'the word Chinese itself was a source of division, derision and dissatisfaction', as 'artists born in Hong Kong, Malaysia or

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Chinese strand of the Swansea UK Year of Literature in 1994 and collaborated on several projects, including the exhibitions *Journeys West: Contemporary Paintings, Sculpture and Installation* (1995) at the Chinese Arts Centre, Firstsite at the Minories Art Gallery, Colchester and the University of Essex Gallery; *Half the Sky* (1997) at the Museum of London and the *New Moves* conference in 1999, with Grace Lau in partnership with the V&A and the Chinese Arts Centre.

[12] For example, the London Chinese Arts Forum (1993), Borderlines (1998) and the New Vocabulary for Chinese Arts (1998).

Taiwan did not necessarily consider themselves peers, nor did they particularly identify with British born first or second generation artists.' (Hansen 1998: 2).

Similarly, the appellation 'British Chinese' has been vociferously disputed. For some, it was an inclusive term incorporating any 'Chinese' artist in Britain. For others, it referred to Chinese artists with connections to former British colonies. Arguably, hegemonic use referred, as in wider discourse, to the 'experiences and perspectives unique to Chinese people raised in Britain' (Parker 2003: 258) as reflected in the associated terms, 'British-born Chinese' or 'BBC', who are often assumed to come from Hong Kong backgrounds. Such differences were significant as they related to hierarchies of power and boundaries of exclusion within 'Chinese'. Some artists also voiced concerns about the way race, class, gender, and sexuality intersect to produce further marginalization, although these differences were dealt with far more extensively in cultural productions. Further contestation came from those of mixed racial backgrounds, who could either be included unambiguously as 'Chinese' thus erasing their specificity or, especially for actors, such as David Yip or Daniel York, excluded from 'Chinese' roles for 'not being Chinese enough'. Reflecting 'black' art debates, questions were further raised about whether such categories referred to the identity and/or experience of artists, to their politics or the aesthetics of their works.

Such differences affected access to and forms of visibility. Distinctions between overseas 'Chinese' and immigrant 'British Chinese' could, for example, be tallied to hierarchical differentiations between 'high art' and 'community arts', a legacy of the way so-called 'ethnic minority arts' were tied to an imagined 'ethnic community'. Opportunities for artists perceived to be 'British Chinese' were often limited to the 'community' or 'educational' activities, funded by local councils and publicly subsided institutions in line with government policy, where 'community' was conceived along racial lines. As one-time community arts worker Barbara Hunt (cited in Fisher 2005: 188) recalled,

> we were pushed off into community arts and given funds … to work within 'our' communities – that idea of native informant, that we somehow owned these communities, even though we'd never grown up with them, we didn't speak the same language, but we might look a little the same.

Based on the perceived social function of art and requiring the approval of institutions, local authorities and so-called 'Chinese community leaders', such projects often placed constraints upon artists (see also Tan, this volume). Within single-ethnicity projects more widely, artists were often expected to work within enforced – and conflated – notions of 'community', 'Chineseness' and 'cultural heritage', with 'Chinese communities', usually during 'Chinese' festivals, with traditional 'Chinese' art forms or artefacts. Where artists' works did not fit these criteria, they were sometimes simply excluded.

Another point of contention has been the homogenizing effects of ethnicity-based projects, especially in the context of the increasing depoliticisation and commodification of difference. Notably, a sudden flurry of 'Chinese' related events surfaced in the run-up of the Hong Kong handover. Such projects provided opportunities to gain visibility but they often erased differences in artistic practices and concerns, thereby homogenizing them all as simply '(British)-Chinese'. Moreover, appearing in a new climate of the 'hypervisibility' of difference (Mercer 1999), such proejcts risked neutralisation by frameworks of 'entertainment' and 'cultural curiosity', as well as cannibalisation by discourses of multiculturalism (Yeh 2000). Thus, as Hylton (2007: 130) has pointed out, in the visual arts, major institutions favoured the 'once-every-five-years' type exhibitions over sustained engagement with individual artists. In the performing arts, the case is similar. While it has taken longer for all-Asian casts to appear on the mainstream British stage, one-off productions with an all, or predominantly, East Asian cast, such as *Wild Swans* (Young Vic, 2012), are currently seen to 'solve' the problem of diversity. Yet, by offering inclusion in a hypervisible way – what Ang (2001: 139) has called 'inclusion by virtue of othering' – such productions work to delegitimise claims of marginalization while enabling exclusions from non-ethnic specific productions to continue.

On a discursive level, the theme of many projects engendered specific tropes of Chineseness in which the complexity of British Chinese experience was rendered unseen. Although many spoke to critical issues – migration and displacement for example, and evidence a strategic attempt to attract audiences – they still demonstrate

how constraining discourses determining what it was possible to think and say about Chineseness were during the late 1990s to 2000s in Britain. The exhibitions *Journeys West* (1995) and *Far From the Shore* (1997), alongside *Another Province* (a book in 1994 and a separate exhibition in 1997) conjured a romanticised cultural remoteness. The exhibitions *Second Generation* (1999) and *Cultural Resolution* (2002) evoked ideas of cultural adaptation and integration. Several projects based on takeaways, dimsum and food, such as *F:EAST* (2000) and *Fortune Cookies* (1997) cast (British)-Chineseness in the realm of commodity consumption.[13] Meanwhile, the exhibition *Inside Out: Year of the Pig* (2007) while ambitiously recalling the major 1998/9 *Inside/Out: New Chinese Art* exhibition in the US[14] regressively revived stereotypical associations of the Chinese zodiac, turning contemporary art practice into clichéd expectations of the marketplace – quite literally, as an eclectic mix of works were exhibited in the basement of the Trocadero Centre in Leicester Square, London.

An examination of the promotional material advertising such events further demonstrates how the positioning of 'Chinese' arts reinforced invisibility through stereotypical difference, as well as the construction of Britain as 'newly' multicultural. A repetitive vocabulary of 'first evers', 'raising profiles', 'celebrations', 'years of the rabbit, horse, pig, etc' and so on, provide a textual accompaniment to a surreal and fantastical Orientalised visual landscape inhabited by dragons and lions, typhoons, waves and mountains, falling leaves, takeaways, an exotic 'alphabet' of calligraphic characters and endless 'Chinese New Years'. While the Orientalising motifs construct 'Chinese' through an essential otherness, by continually claiming novelty such projects also suffer from a focus on the contemporary moment (Mercer 2005), erasing centuries of 'Chinese' artistic practices in Britain. The 'celebration' of Chineseness not only seeks to compensate for a lack of rights but also disavows how diversity is a historical legacy of colonialism and an effect of contemporary global flows of capital and labour (Naidoo 2013).

[13] For example, the exhibitions *Beyond the Takeaway* (1992), Bima dance company's *Chinese Takeaway* (1997), Yellow Earth's installation *Behind the Chinese Takeaway* (1997), Mulan's theatre's *Take Away* (1998), the anthology *Dimsum* (1997) and the website *Dimsum* established in 2000.

[14] Curated by Gao Minglu and held at the Asia Society Gallery, New York and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

The question of locating ‘British-Chinese’ within global flows has been significant in the context of the rise of Chinese art in the international arena throughout the 1990s. The responses of Britain’s major cultural institutions was slow, and interest came first from those working in ‘(British)-Chinese’ art itself. The conferences *Journeys West* (1995) and *New Moves: Chinese Arts* (1999) sought to situate British Chinese art within an international framework, and both featured the internationally renowned Paris-based curator and art critic Hou Hanru as keynote speaker. In 2002, the *Chinese Art in the International Arena* conference again attempted to shift debates beyond Britain, but arguably eclipsed, rather than engaged, existing debates, with only three of twenty-six papers discussing British-based artists. Locating “British Chinese” art within an international context has the potential to enable artists to transcend a “minority” status accorded by British racial politics and become visible, albeit still with an ethnic prefix, as part of a globally significant phenomenon of “contemporary Chinese” or “Asian” art, film, or culture. However, the rise of China has in fact further contributed to British Chinese invisibility.

In the run-up to the Hong Kong handover, wider British interest in contemporary Chinese culture, specifically from the mainland, began to develop. The ICA launched a Beijing-London festival (1999) and new galleries devoted to art from China, such as Chinese Contemporary (1996) and Red Mansion (1999), emerged. Distinctions grew between practitioners based on perceived authenticity, measured in terms of purported proximity to ‘China’. Hierarchies emerged between ‘international’ and ‘British Chinese’ artists, the former more likely to be perceived as authentically ‘Chinese’ (even if based in other parts of Europe). Major British galleries began opening doors to ‘international’ Chinese artists, for example, the Serpentine’s *Chen Zhen* exhibition (2001), while opportunities for British-based artists remained marginal. The Camden Arts Centre hosted the first solo (and posthumous) exhibition of China-born UK-based Li Yuan-chia in the UK since the 1960s but under the remit of ‘international artists’. Longstanding artists such as Qu Leiliei had solo exhibitions at smaller galleries such as Redfern in 1999, but not at major institutions until 2005 at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. Emerging artists such Erika Tan and susan pui san lok were included in the Asia-focused *Cities on the Move* (1999, Hayward Gallery), but only as part of another project within the exhibition. Over the 2000s, the shift towards

China continued, with projects by the Arts Council and British Council,[15] events such as 'China in London' in 2006 and 2007 initiated by Ken Livingstone as London mayor in the run-up to the 2008 Beijing Olympics and Saatchi's expansion into Chinese art in 2008. Britain had finally joined the rest of the world in the China 'gold rush'. In 2013, even the Chinese Arts Centre, whose original aims were to promote British Chinese artists rebranded as 'the Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art' (see Chan and Willis, this volume and Kennedy 2016). Where once British-based immigrant artists were hegemonic in formulations of British-Chineseness, the symbolic power of China today reignites hierarchies between "British" and "international" Chinese artists. In the recent Southbank Centre's China Changing festival in 2016, for example, British-based artists were invited to participate, but artists from China occupied center stage. The interest in China thus threatens to further marginalize the "British Chinese."

**'British East Asian'**

If the 'China' rush has overshadowed British Chinese artists and is continuing to do so, it is also important to acknowledge how the categories 'Chinese' and 'British Chinese' have also been hegemonic over other East and South East Asian cultural practices in the UK. As Rogers (this volume) suggests, 'British Chinese' is part of a wider British East Asian cultural practice, and this is demonstrated by a range of 'East Asian' events, especially in the performing arts. For example, starting in 1995, Pit Fong Loh ran *Re:Orient* – a dance festival with artists with links to Japan, Taiwan, Korea, China and Hong Kong – for five years at The Place, London. In 2000, the festival *Fast Forward* (2000) also in London, presented Mu-Lan Theatre's *Daughter of the River* alongside dance by groups with links to South Asia, Japan, China and Korea.[16] Yet, arguably, as 'Chinese' is a state-recognized category that organizes access to funding, artists working under this category enjoy greater visibility than other East and Southeast Asians.

[15] E.g. the Artist's Links (2002–06) joint project developing exchanges between 'Chinese' artists in England – including Anthony Lam, Erika Tan, Eric Fong and Suki Chan – and China.

[16] A collaboration between the Studio Theatre, The Bull and Watermans Arts Centre, London.

That ‘Chinese’ has functioned as a racial category shaping the visibility of others is demonstrated by the way in which opportunities for those (South) East Asian artists have often been appended to Chinese New Year. In 2000, for example the *F:EAST: Pan Asian Arts Festival* at The Bull, which showcased artists of ‘South East Asian, Chinese and Japanese descent’, was tied to Chinese New Year celebrations. Included were the Japan-born performance artist Kazuo Hokhi, the Malaysian-born dancer Mavin Khoo, of mixed Chinese and Sri Lankan parentage, but usually seen as a South Asian dancer, for working within the Indian aesthetic of Bharatanatyam, the Filipino Lahing Kayumanggi Dance Company and Syair Malaysian poetry. The dominance of ‘Chinese’ over other East and Southeast Asian identities within the British social imagination is further demonstrated by the way in which anyone ‘looking East Asian’ is often assumed to be Chinese (Barber 2015). This is particularly irksome for artists in a context where their works are often read through their assumed biographies – Vong Phaophanit once voiced his irritation at being called a Chinese artist, when much of his early work was specifically about being exiled from Laos.[17]

The categories ‘Chinese’ and ‘British-Chinese’ have therefore long been contested from both inside and out, and alternatives sought and used. In 1995, debates unfolded about the position and categorization of ‘South East Asian’ and ‘Pacific’ artists at meetings at the Studio Theatre in London. Some organisations, notably Mulan Theatre (1988–2004) and Yellow Earth Theatre (1995–) used the term ‘Oriental’ in their early days. That they did is indicative of the state of hegemonic racial discourse in the UK, in which the term’s colonial and racialised connotations was not (and often still is not) recognised, itself indicative of the lack of understanding of specific forms of racialization experienced by East and Southeast Asians. What the identification intended to make visible, however, was the plurality of the artists’ backgrounds working with the groups (Singapore, Guyana, Hong Kong, Japan Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines etc) and an interest in wider East Asian experiences and themes.[18]

[17] Many thanks to Lesley Sanderson for bringing this to my attention.

[18] Mu-Lan theatre was set up by Meeling Ng and Shu-Fern Sinclair to give the Chinese a voice and was run by Singapore-born Glen Goei and later Paul Courtenay Hyu of mixed English and Guyanese Chinese background. Mu-Lan worked with many Singapore-born writers such as Henry Ong and Chay Yew and actors with links to Asia, as well as producing Japan-related plays such as *The Magic Fandoshi* (1993) and *Three Japanese Women* (1995). Meanwhile, Yellow Earth Theatre was founded in 1993 by Kwong Loke, Kumiko Mendl, Veronica Needa, David K.S. Tse and Tom Wu, variously from Hong Kong, Japan and

Since the late 1990s at least, both Yellow Earth and Mu-Lan along with a host of actors and other artists have actively campaigned for the end to the use of 'Oriental', advocating 'British East Asian' instead. Through the 2000s, the Arts Council England adopted the term unevenly, but its salience is growing, which points to the limitations of the state's capacity for shaping specific identities yet also its strength in determining the continued significance of race, particularly for those working in the performing arts, whose bodies are on display. Yet 'British East Asian', as a tactical, provisional mobilisation, does attend to one of the major contestations of British Chinese by offering a more inclusive category that engages a wider politics of visibility.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have traced some of the processes of racialization and categorisation that have impacted on the visibility and invisibility of 'British Chinese' arts over the past few decades. In doing so, I have also highlighted some of the work of so-called 'British Chinese' cultural practitioners emerging in the 1990s and into the 2000s, which contests the invisibility of the 'Chinese' in British culture as a material absence, and one that can be explained in cultural terms. Rather, I have demonstrated the central role played by the legacies of race and empire in shaping contemporary structural inequalities in the way state and wider discourses and practices have contributed to this invisibility. The category 'British Chinese' has occupied a specific positioning of invisibility within Arts Council policy and wider British culture that reflects its marginalised place within British colonial relations and aligns with longstanding racialised discourses of a 'model minority'. Notably, other East and Southeast Asians are rendered even more invisible via incorporation into this category. However, the process of being rendered invisible is not merely by exclusion but by being unseen, whether incorporated into broader narratives of 'black', 'Caribbean', 'Asian' or even 'Chinese' and 'British Chinese' or becoming hypervisible according to reified notions of 'Chineseness' in a specific era of

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Malaysia. It has worked with Vietnamese and Filipino actors, and defines East Asia as 'the area east of Pakistan and west of the Americas' (Tse 2001).

neoliberal multicultural normalization, where difference is depoliticised and commodifiable. In this context, the mobilization of 'British Chinese' as an effective claim to national belonging and visibility as distinct from 'Black', 'Asian' and 'Chinese' has been patchy and fragile, quickly co-opted by publicly subsidized organisations and the private market, and indeed rendered apparently almost entirely insignificant in the face of the rise of, and rush for, China.

To return to the question of racial hierarchies, while the precarious positioning of 'Chinese' as not quite 'British', 'black' or 'Asian' has manifest in particular routes to and arguably greater degrees of cultural invisibility, its marginality cannot be constructed as entirely unique or exceptional, though the divisiveness of the state management of cultural difference might encourage such a view. Further the numerous contestations around 'Chinese' and 'British-Chinese' also testify to multiple layers of inequalities and exclusions within these categories. In terms of access to representation, divisions of (sub)ethnicity, relation to empire, migration trajectories, and language were central to debates in the late 1990s to early 2000s, while issues of gender, sexuality, and class were dealt with mainly in creative productions in a politics of representation. Today this is changing, as the contestation of the Whiteness, elitism, ableism and sexism of British cultural institutions continues unabated. A groundswell of Chinese and other East and Southeast Asian cultural activity is flourishing today, with many visual artists, theater and performing arts companies and initiatives, and writing collectives emerging. Those who began working in the 1990s are now establishing careers that enable them to continue creating opportunities and advocating for change. There have also been new mobilizations around the collective term 'British East Asian', which, notably, have drawn on different quarters that make up the ordinary multiculture of Britain as well as international support, testifying to the possiblities of transnational, multi-racial solidarities in a wider politics of visibility for all minoritized groups. Despite this, however, what is particularly damning is the perception among many practitioners that in hindsight the 1990s and 2000s were decades in which issues of access and visibility were less problematic than now. Indeed, despite the rise of diversity initiatives in the intervening years, there has in fact been a drop in employment rates among those ascribed as 'Black, Asian and minority ethnic' in the creative industries to the lowest since records began (Creative Skillset 2012). As the struggle in a politics

of visibility continues, rather than repeatedly lamenting the 'lack' of Chinese and other East and Southeast Asian artists and attributing it to 'culture', it is essential for policy-makers, cultural institutions, practitioners and academics alike to acknowledge how discourses and practices, shaped by colonial and racial legacies, contribute to an invisibility that involves not only outright exclusion, though that also persists, but also a form of 'visibility' in which it is possible to remain 'unseen'. In other words, acknowledging the specific positioning of 'Chinese', 'British Chinese' and 'British East Asian' – and the myriad of differences within them – in relation to 'British', 'black', and 'Asian' provides an opportunity to reflect on the finer nuances of just how far there is to go for the nation's cultural institutions to truly reflect the ordinary multiculture of postcolonial Britain.

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