

# Call for Papers: Uncovering British Chinese Cultures

Technische Universität Dresden, Germany

2-3 December 2023

In current academic work, the British Chinese perspectives are predominantly characterised by their absence. Only a single collection of articles dealing with the topic, Ashley Thorpe and Diana Yeh's *Contesting British Chinese Culture* (2018), has been published to date. Considering the long tradition of ethnically Chinese migration to the UK and the many generations of British Chinese living in the UK, it is, therefore, fair to state that they still represent an 'invisible minority' in British Cultural Studies.

One reason for this remarkable absence might lie in the British definition of the term 'Asian'. While in the United States, the term includes people with East Asian heritage, the British term applies exclusively to people from South Asian extraction (Thorpe & Yeh 3), which means that anthologies and collections about British Asian writing usually do not contain a single contribution by British Chinese writers. Instead, these have to be found in publications specifically focussing on British *East Asian* writers. Moreover, the number of publications with a specific focus on British Chinese cultural production remains low. Only in 2018 did Jingan Young publish a collection of exclusively British East Asian plays entitled *Foreign Goods: A Selection of Writing by East Asian Artists*, followed in the same year by Cheryl Robson, Amanda Rogers and (again) Ashley Thorpe's collection of *British East Asian Plays*, and in 2022 by Helena Lee's edited collection of essays on East Asian and Southeast Asian (ESEA) identity in Britain, entitled *East Side Voices*. These three publications have been the first anthologies of their kind for any genre of British East Asian writing since Graham Chan's *Dim Sum (Little Pieces of Heart): British Chinese Short Stories*, published in 1997.

While this conference employs the term 'British Chinese', this is used with an awareness of its problematic implications, since it seeks to group together human beings with highly divergent backgrounds and racialises 'Chineseness'. However, the term also highlights the specific forms of exclusionary and discriminatory practices and discourses targeted at this particular minority that have a long tradition in Britain, and which differ from those faced by other British minority groups. We, therefore, utilise Thorpe and Yeh's definition of 'British Chinese' as "a contested political construction", which "emphatically does not refer to any natural or given 'identity' or 'community' but has been both mobilized by and imposed onto cultural practitioners in the context of specific struggles over racial marginalization and invisibility" (6).

This observation is the rationale for the central concern of this conference with visibility. Specifically, the conference will address the following questions: Why is it that British Chinese cultural practitioners and their work are so notably absent from scholarly inquiry? Why is it that British Chinese individuals become only visible in public discourse "in the context of [...] an ethnic niche of restaurant and takeaway businesses" (*ibid.* 2)? The question of media representation and visibility has to be asked with renewed fervour after the first waves of the Covid-19 pandemic suddenly rendered British Chinese very visible in the

public eye; however, not as part of a multiethnic Britain, but as targets of racist attacks. Racist narratives of the ‘yellow peril’, the ‘red threat’ or the subversive ‘model minority’ have resurfaced in quality and quantity, unprecedented in the 21st century.

This conference, therefore, seeks to make British Chinese perspectives visible and to bring these into focus with contributions that address topics including – but not restricted to – the following:

- definitions/contestation of terminology ‘British Chinese’, ‘British East Asian’ etc.
- migration to the UK / to East Asia
- multiculturalism
- diaspora
- generational conflict in British Chinese artistic productions
- media representation of British Chinese culture
- (re)definition of often racialised spaces, e.g. Chinatown, the Chinese takeaway
- racism and discrimination, e.g. Covid-19
- stereotyping and sinophobia, e.g. ‘Yellow Peril’
- British Chinese media adaptations of historic events, e.g. the Opium Wars
- discourses of in/visibility
- queer British Chinese identities
- British Chinese culture and gender
- British Chinese culture and class

If you are interested in participating, please send an abstract of approx. 250-300 words to [judith.neder@tu-dresden.de](mailto:judith.neder@tu-dresden.de) by May 25th.

The conference organisers are Judith Neder, M.A., (Technische Universität Dresden), Dr Ivan Stacy (Beijing Normal University), and Prof. Cornelia Wächter (Technische Universität Dresden).

### **Works Cited**

Thrope, Ashley and Diana Yeh. “Introduction: Contesting British Chinese Culture.” *Contesting British Chinese Culture*, edited by *ibid.*, Palgrave, 2018, pp. 1-31.