

CHINA'S MULTIPLE PASTS: CURATING CHINESE DIASPORA IN HERITAGE AND MUSEUMS

DATES: 10-11 September 2026

VENUE: Room 117, Faculty of History, University of Warsaw

PROGRAMME

DAY 1: 10 September 2026 (Thursday)

TIME	PROGRAMME
10:00-10:15	Introductory Remarks
10:15-11:00	Cangbai Wang (<i>University of Westminster</i>) An Archaeology of 'Huaqiao Wenwu': Museum Representations of the Chinese Diasporas in China
11:00-11:30	TEA BREAK
11:30-12:15	Juan Du (<i>Héritages – CY Cergy Paris Université/CNRS/Ministère de la Culture</i>) The Ancestral Home as a <i>Lieu de mémoire</i> : Heritage-Making and the Transmission of Migratory Memories in an Ordinary Chinese Emigrant Family
12:15-13:00	Nattaporn Luangpipat (<i>Northwestern University in Qatar</i>) The Chinese as National Mirror: Museum Representations, State Narratives, and Belonging in Southeast Asia
13:00-14:30	LUNCH BREAK
14:30-15:15	Jeremy Taylor (<i>University of Nottingham</i>) Questioning the "Chineseness" of the New Villages: The Political Challenge of Celebrating Rural Chinese Culture and History in Contemporary Malaysia

15:15-16:00	Yunci Cai (<i>University of Leicester</i>) From Ancestral China to Uniquely Singaporean Chinese Heritage: Reframing Chinese Identity in Singapore's Museums and Cultural Institutions
16:00-16:30	TEA BREAK
16:30-17:15	Jiayu Deng (<i>University of Warsaw</i>) Community Museums as A New Community Centre of Malaysian Chinese Society: A Case Study of the History Gallery of Kepong-Jinjang & SJKC Kepong
17:15-18:00	Mariana P. L. Pereira (<i>University of York</i>) Diaspora in the Making: Assemblage and Heritage in the exhibition <i>Estórias Lusas</i> , Hong Kong.
19:00	DINNER on the premises of the Faculty of History

DAY 2: 11 September 2026 (Friday)

TIME	PROGRAMME
9:30-10:15	Gil Diaz Turingan (<i>University of Warsaw</i>) Digital Heritage and Decolonial Memory: Framing the Wha Chi's World War II Legacy Amidst Contemporary Sino-Philippine Tensions
10:15-10:45	TEA BREAK
10:45-11:30	Laura Pozzi (<i>University of Warsaw</i>) Entangled Histories, Parallel Memories: Chinese and Thai Commemorative sites in Chiang Rai Province.
11:30-12:15	Igor Chabrowski (<i>University of Warsaw</i>) Overseas Chinese Congregations in Bangkok – A Case of Negotiated Identity
12:15-13:30	LUNCH BREAK
13:30-14:30	FINAL REMARKS DISCUSSION Chair: Ornella De Nigris (<i>University of Siena</i>)
15:30-18:00	VISIT TO THE POLIN MUSEUM
19:00	DINNER Restauracja Cinema Paradiso Krakowskie Przedmieście 21/23, 00-071 Warszawa

ABSTRACTS

DAY 1—10 September 2026 (Thursday)

Cangbai Wang, University of Westminster

An Archaeology of ‘Huaqiao Wenwu’: Museum Representations of the Chinese Diasporas in China

Museums in all societies have a powerful role in making knowledge and shaping identity, and there is no exception in China. This paper focuses on one particular type of museums emerging in China, the ‘Overseas Chinese museums’ or the ‘Overseas Chinese-themed museums’, a generic term used by the Chinese authorities to refer to museums or memorial halls specialising in displaying the history of Chinese emigration and return. Drawing on scholarship in museum and migration studies and through a case study of the Overseas Chinese History Museum of China (OCHMC), it attempts to disentangle the complex relationship between museum building and history writing by tracing how the term ‘huaqiao wenwu’, a neologism referring to cultural relics of the Chinese diasporas in the PRC, has been invented, decoded, encoded and re-encoded in the context of China’s shifting political discourses over the past two decades. The study makes a compelling case for the socially constructive nature of the naming, classification and evaluation of museum objects which has a direct bearing on what is counted as knowledge and truth. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions: why and how do the Chinese authorities stage Chinese diasporas in the public space of museums at the turn of the 21st century, and to what extent do museum representations of Chinese diasporas contribute to the re-definition of Chinese nation and re-interpretation of Chinese history? And what does this research tell us about the relationship between museum practice, public history and identity construction more broadly?

Juan Du, Héritages – CY Cergy Paris Université/CNRS/Ministère de la Culture

The Ancestral Home as a *Lieu de mémoire*: Heritage-Making and the Transmission of Migratory Memories in an Ordinary Chinese Emigrant Family

Memory has become a significant issue in migration studies, both in host societies and in countries of origin. In host countries, it relates to the identity and social recognition of first- and second-generation immigrants. In countries of origin, it concerns the integration of emigration history into national narratives and processes of nation-building (Wang, 2021). China has a long history of emigration dating back to the late sixteenth century. With more than 10 million international migrants, it became the world’s third-largest country of emigration in 2020.

This heritage-making process began in the 1950s with the establishment of the Overseas Chinese Museum (*Huaqiao Bowuyuan*) in Xiamen in 1959, the first museum dedicated to Chinese emigrants. It accelerated after the Reform and Opening-up period, as numerous emigration museums—or, in official terminology, “Overseas Chinese” museums—were established at both national and local levels, particularly in regions with long histories of emigration. Beyond their cultural function, these institutions also serve political purposes by incorporating overseas Chinese into the construction of the Chinese nation.

The permanent exhibitions of these museums primarily celebrate the achievements of prominent emigrants

and their contributions to their home communities, while largely overlooking the experiences of ordinary migrants. This raises an important question: how do ordinary families—the largely absent voices in official narratives—preserve and transmit the memory of their ancestors' migration?

This paper presents preliminary reflections based on fieldwork conducted at the ancestral home of an ordinary emigrant family in Quanzhou, southern China. It examines how memories are transmitted through the ancestral home as a *lieu de mémoire* and asks whether these family-based practices reproduce, complement, or challenge dominant institutional narratives of China's migration history.

Nattaporn Luangpipat, Northwestern University in Qatar

The Chinese as National Mirror: Museum Representations, State Narratives, and Belonging in Southeast Asia

Museums are not merely spaces of historical preservation; they are powerful cultural institutions that shape public understandings of identity, heritage, and national belonging. Serving as the foundational phase of a broader project examining Chinese diaspora representation across Southeast Asia, this study analyzes national, local, and community museums in Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia. The focus is on how these institutions frame stories of migration, citizenship, and belonging through their locations, spatial arrangements, and visual, textual, and interactive displays. The presentation examines whose stories and memories are foregrounded or marginalized, and how sensitive or complex historical events are addressed. By comparing museums in both major historic settlements and regions with smaller Chinese populations, the study shows how distinct institutional, geographic, and political contexts shape public memory. This paper argues that representations of the Chinese diaspora function as a “national mirror” – a lens through which Southeast Asian societies define trajectories of statehood, multiculturalism, and belonging. Rather than treating diasporic communities as fixed ethnic subjects, this study reveals how museum representations position the Chinese diaspora within broader stories of national development and how contemporary Southeast Asian societies imagine and narrate themselves. In this workshop, I will present my research questions and preliminary field data to gather theoretical and methodological feedback on analyzing museum displays and textual narratives across diverse regional contexts. I also welcome collaboration opportunities to further develop or expand this project.

Jeremy Taylor, University of Nottingham

Questioning the “Chineseness” of the New Villages: The Political Challenge of Celebrating Rural Chinese Culture and History in Contemporary Malaysia

Under a colonial counterinsurgency campaign instigated during the Malayan Emergency in the 1950s, about a quarter of the ethnic Chinese population of Malaya was forcibly resettled into hundreds of camps which would, from 1952 onwards, be known as “New Villages” (NVs). The vast majority of people resettled into NVs were ethnically Chinese, though members of other communities were also resettled into such spaces. While the NVs started out as highly controlled spaces designed to cut off links between communist guerillas and rural “squatters”, many developed into thriving local (and multi-ethnic) communities. Most survive today.

Over the last two decades, local leaders and community activists in NVs have sought to rediscover, document and celebrate their local history and culture. This has manifested itself in a variety of ways, from efforts to promote NVs as sites of culinary tourism to preservation campaigns which have underscored both the tangible

and intangible heritage of specific NVs. This has coincided with a rise in academic and community-led scholarship on the NVs (much of it published in Chinese). In turn, Malaysian artists have explored NV culture as a source of inspiration for new endeavours. And largescale events such as “New Village Expos” have been organised by state authorities to promote NV-based handicraft production, agriculture and other industries.

One of the key political challenges for such developments, however, has been continuing debates about the “Chineseness” of the NVs. The politics of race and ethnicity in Malaysia – something which was underlined during the Malayan Emergency of the 1950s, and again during the crisis of 1969 – continues to shape the ways in which the NVs are discussed. Indeed, the very notion of the “Chinese New Village” – a phrase which was often used by the colonial state when resettlement was being undertaken – has now become problematic. Should NVs be celebrated as a part of a national Malaysian history (thereby de-emphasising the specifically Chinese elements of these communities), or do they represent part of an experience of resettlement which was overwhelmingly felt by rural Chinese communities? In confronting such questions, NV community groups themselves have had to balance their interests and concerns with a rising Malay ethno-nationalism which, in some cases, has been openly hostile to any notion of a “Chinese” Malaysian identity (or to the idea of even recognising NVs as sites of cultural value).

Based on research undertaken through the AHRC-funded “resettling the Colonial Lens” Project, this paper will explore how these debates have led to all kinds of contradictions, whereby NV communities have highlighted distinctly Chinese cultural practices and traditions while at the same not drawing attention to their own “Chineseness”. It will also discuss how ethno-politics continues to shape how NVs are defined within Malaysia’s Chinese-speaking community.

Yunci Cai, University of Leicester

From Ancestral China to Uniquely Singaporean Chinese Heritage: Reframing Chinese Identity in Singapore’s Museums and Cultural Institutions

This paper examines the changing representation and curation of Chinese heritage in Singapore, tracing a shift from narratives that foreground Singapore’s ancestral and cultural connections to China toward a more distinctly Singaporean articulation of Chinese identity. It focuses on the changing institutional landscape from the early 2000s to the present, comparing the Asian Civilisations Museum and Sun Yat Sen Nanyang Memorial Hall with the Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre and the China Cultural Centre.

In the early 2000s, major heritage and museum institutions in Singapore placed considerable emphasis on the Chinese diaspora’s ancestral links to China. Such narratives situated Singapore’s Chinese population within a longer history of migration, cultural exchange, and civilizational connections with China. In subsequent years, however, the institutional framing of Chinese heritage has increasingly emphasised the formation of a distinctive Singaporean Chinese identity. The Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre, established by the Singapore government, is particularly significant in this regard. Rather than treating Chinese culture primarily as an inheritance from China, it presents Chinese Singaporean culture as a locally rooted and historically specific formation, shaped by Singapore’s multicultural society and distinct from contemporary mainland Chinese identity. At the same time, the China Cultural Centre, established by the PRC government, provides a contrasting institutional platform through which Chinese culture and contemporary China are represented in Singapore.

I argue that the changing relationship between these institutions not only reflects a shift in cultural policy, but an evolving negotiation between local, national, and transnational understandings of Chinese identity in Singapore. The changing geopolitical relationship between Singapore and the PRC has contributed to

heightened sensitivity within the Singaporean state toward the political implications of cultural and ancestral connections to China, particularly given the historical association between segments of the Chinese Singaporean population and competing visions of China. Museums and cultural institutions consequently become important sites in which the boundaries between mainland Chinese and Chinese Singaporean are actively negotiated.

By examining institutional vocabularies, curatorial narratives, and the spatial and political contexts in which these institutions operate, the paper asks whose memories and versions of Chinese heritage are being authorised, reframed, or marginalised. Rather than viewing Singaporean Chinese heritage as an extension of Chinese national heritage, I explore how it has been progressively reconfigured as a uniquely Singaporean heritage, while remaining in dialogue, and sometimes in tension, with the PRC's increasingly influential cultural and civilisational narratives. Singapore therefore offers a particularly revealing case for understanding how Overseas Chinese heritage is situated between ancestral memory, nation-building, and contemporary geopolitics, and how museums and heritage institutions can simultaneously reproduce, negotiate, and unsettle transnational narratives of Chineseness.

Jiayu Deng, University of Warsaw

Community Museums as A New Community Centre of Malaysian Chinese Society: A Case Study of the History Gallery of Kepong-Jinjang & SJKC Kepong

With the emergence of New Museology in the late twentieth century, museums have increasingly shifted from object-centred institutions to socially engaged spaces that emphasise community participation, multiple interpretations and shared authority. This transformation has also influenced museum development in Malaysia. Since the late 1990s, Malaysian Chinese community museums have been established to preserve Chinese history and cultural heritage while providing alternative narratives to the state's Authorised Heritage Discourse, which has traditionally privileged Malay-Muslim history and culture. This study examines the History Gallery of Kepong-Jinjang & SJKC Kepong as a case study of a Malaysian Chinese community museum. Drawing on participant observation, interviews, documentary research and exhibition analysis, it explores how the museum functions as an educational and participatory space that preserves local history and cultural heritage. The study further analyses how the museum constructs narratives of local Chinese history through community participation, preserves Chinese cultural heritage, and fosters community cohesion while strengthening local, ethnic and national identities. Beyond its role as a repository of historical memory, the museum has evolved into a new community centre that facilitates cultural transmission, public engagement and collective identity formation within the Malaysian Chinese community. By examining this case, the study contributes to broader discussions on community museums, minority cultural heritage, and the changing social role of museums in multicultural Malaysia.

Mariana P. L. Pereira, University of York

Diaspora in the Making: Assemblage and Heritage in the exhibition *Estórias Lusas*, Hong Kong.

How do museums participate in the construction of diaspora, rather than simply representing a diaspora that already exists? This presentation explores this question through *Estórias Lusas: Stories of the Hong Kong Portuguese*, presented at the Hong Kong Museum of History as part of the Multifaceted Hong Kong Exhibition Series.

Diaspora is often understood through movement, homeland, kinship and temporality. Drawing on Tölölyan's (2012) understanding of diaspora as sustained through recurrent attachments and chosen affiliations, I approach diaspora as made and remade when past movement is given significance in the present. This makes diaspora fundamentally a heritage question: through what contexts, materials and relationships do particular migrations become meaningful, memorable and constitutive of belonging?

To examine this process in the museum, I draw on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of assemblage and use "assembling" as a lens for heritage-making. *Estórias Lusas* brings together objects, personal and family histories, memories, and other heritage expressions connected to the Portuguese-descendants of Macau and Hong Kong. Rather than treating these elements as evidence of a coherent, pre-existing diasporic identity, the presentation asks what happens through their selection, juxtaposition and re-articulation: what relationships between people, places and pasts are produced; which colonial and postcolonial trajectories become legible; and what is foregrounded, transformed or left outside the assemblage?

The case therefore opens a wider critical question for museums curating diaspora: if diasporic identities are relational, multi-local and contextually performed, how can museums approach their heritage without fixing the very categories they seek to represent? Through *Estórias Lusas*, I consider museums as active sites of diaspora-making, and ask how such heritage-making can negotiate multiple pasts while also complicating the boundaries through which the histories and experiences of Portuguese-descendants in China are understood.

DAY 2—11 September 2026 (Friday)

Gil Diaz Turingan, University of Warsaw

Digital Heritage and Decolonial Memory: Framing the Wha Chi's World War II Legacy Amidst Contemporary Sino-Philippine Tensions

On Facebook, public commemoration of the Wha Chi (Philippine-Chinese Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Forces) regularly morphs from a tribute to World War II solidarity into a battleground over current Sino-Philippine relations. Museums and cultural institutions in the Philippines typically present the Wha Chi through a narrative of Sino-Filipino World War II camaraderie and shared anti-fascist sacrifice, but digital platforms expose how fragile this historical memory becomes when dragged into present-day geopolitics.

Based on this premise, this article examines how the memory of the Wha Chi is curated and contested within digital heritage spaces on Facebook, shaping how Filipinos navigate historical, national, and geopolitical ties with China. Applying Digital Discourse Analysis (DDA) and framing theory, this research analyzes Facebook posts published by state and non-state heritage actors alongside the user comments they generate. The analysis uncovers three main intersecting discursive threads: (1) a widespread knowledge gap regarding the historical role played by Chinese-Filipinos in anti-colonial resistance; (2) narratives of deep gratitude and recognition for Wha Chi veterans; and (3) hostile re-framings that weaponize this history against the backdrop of the West Philippine Sea (South China Sea) dispute and the controversies surrounding Philippine Offshore Gaming Operators (POGOs).

By analyzing these digital interactions as informal sites of heritage curation, this research reveals how Overseas Chinese heritage is continuously mobilized, reframed, or renegotiated in response to national anxieties and transnational tensions. It also unpacks what it means to decolonize and curate diaspora narratives when the World War II solidarity confronts contemporary geopolitical friction, demonstrating how ordinary citizens actively negotiate and weaponize historical memory on social media.

Laura Pozzi, University of Warsaw

Entangled Histories, Parallel Memories: Chinese and Thai Commemorative sites in Chiang Rai Province.

The history of Chiang Rai Province in northwest Thailand is intimately entangled with the production, smuggling, and distribution of opium. During the Cold War, the Guomindang 93rd Division's soldiers played a key role in the opium trade in the region. After refusing to surrender to the Chinese Communist Party in 1950, these soldiers escaped first to Burma and later to Thailand, where their presence was tolerated in exchange for their help in containing the Communist insurgencies at the Thai borders. Despite their official assimilation into the Thai state, the inhabitants of Mae Salong still preserve a distinct Chinese identity. This paper focuses on the "Chinese Martyrs' Memorial Hall of Culture and History" in Mae Salong. Built in 2003, the memorial functions as an ancestral hall to commemorate the soldiers who fell in the fight against Communism and the building of Mae Salong. This paper explores the Mae Salong community's memory practices, discussing them in relation to the larger memory scape of Chiang Mai province. In particular, it discusses how the Chinese Martyrs' Memorial Hall eliminated opium from the history of the community. In contrast, other museums in the province (the Hall of Opium, House of Opium, and the Doi Tung Royal Villa) place opium at the centre of the history of the province, showing how the Mae Salong community's memory scape runs parallel to the one promoted by Thai institutions.

Igor Chabrowski, University of Warsaw

Overseas Chinese Congregations in Bangkok – A Case of Negotiated Identity

This paper will investigate how Bangkok's Chinese co-provincial congregations negotiated their complex pasts. Co-provincial congregations (bang 幫, *huiguan* 會館, *tongxianghui* 同鄉會) are nodal spots for the social life of Chinese communities across Southeast Asia serving multiple functions, whether celebratory, associative, commemorative, or self-governmental. In Bangkok they owned graveyards, assisted Siamese authorities in channeling migration, defined the urban labor market, and structured the communal power relations. By the early twentieth century, Bangkok Chinese were grouped in five main congregations: Chaozhou, Fujian, Guangzhou, Hainan, Hakka. During the WW2, these congregations and respective communities suffered repressions from both Thai military authorities and Japanese forces. After the war, they were in fulcrum of the mass politics, which reflected both local conflicts and struggles taking place in China's mainland. The congregations weathered the mid-century political storms by resorting to culture of accommodation in front of the two competing Chinese governments: the resurgent Thai monarchy, and the nationalist politics of Phibun and post-Phibun Thailand. They have created a culture that evaded challenging authority, at the same time embracing particularity and uniqueness of one's identity and heritage of the native place. The physical structures of the congregational buildings, their financial capability, and their ability to publish and broadcast their history, provided a space for a negotiated Sino-Thai elitist identity that brushed

aside inter-communal conflicts, class-conflicts, or challenging questions that underpinned existence of the socially and economically significant Chinese communities within the Thai capital.

General Information

ACCOMMODATION

Motel One Warsaw-Chopin

Ul. Tamka 38

00-355 Warsaw, Poland

<https://www.motel-one.com/pl/hotele/warszawa/hotel-warszawa-chopin/>

Check-in is on 9 September and check out on 12 September. Breakfast is included.

The hotel is at walking distance from the University. On the **First Day** one of us will wait for you at **9.40** am in the lobby at the hotel so that you can walk together to the Faculty of History.

UNIVERSITY ADDRESS

Faculty of History,

University of Warsaw

Krakowskie Przedmieście 26/28,

00-927 Warsaw, Poland

CITY TRANSPORTATION

1. **Bus 175** connects **Warsaw Chopin Airport** to the **University** (5 minutes by foot from the Motel 1). It takes around 30 minutes. Tickets are available on board, and they can be purchased with a credit card.

2. Tickets from **Warsaw Modlin Airport** to **Warsaw Centre** can be purchased here:

<https://en.modlinairport.pl/page/bus>

3. The stops are located close to metro stations. The closest metro station to the hotel and the University is **Metro Nowy Świat-Uniwersytet**

CONTACTS

Laura Tel: +48 570 351 280

Jiayu Tel: +48 572 070 886