

Chinese Identities between Localization and Globalization: The South Seas Society, Chinese Intellectuals in Singapore, and Southeast Asian Studies, 1958–1971

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Abstract

Founded in 1940 by scholars from China who were associated with the celebrated China-based tradition of Nanyang studies (*Nanyang yanjiu*), the South Seas Society became an illustrious name among Chinese intellectuals in parts of East Asia and Southeast Asia. Whereas the original Nanyang studies tradition was based on studying the Nanyang (now Southeast Asia) from mainland China's perspective, the Singapore-based Society was established with a slightly different aim: understanding the Nanyang through a Nanyang-centered perspective. In the aftermath of the Second World War, as the Society's connections with China gradually weakened, it also gained a reputation as a pioneer in the Chinese-language track of global Southeast Asian studies. This article suggests that the Society is a useful case study, focusing in particular on the Singapore-Malaya(sia) (*Xinma*) phase in the Society's history that lasted from 1958 to 1971. It argues that an analysis of how localization and globalization influenced the Society during this period can in turn shed new light on the broader topics of Chinese intellectuals in Singapore, ethnic Chinese communities and migration, Chinese identities, and the global development of Southeast Asian studies.

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