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**Expressions of Resistance: Social Realist artworks of the *Yiyanhui*
and the Equator Art Society**

Abstract

During the 1950s, a social realist art movement emerged in Singapore featuring themes such as over-population, unemployment, exploitation of labour and various social ills. I argue that these social realist artworks may be read as expressions of resistance against a colonial discourse which represented Chinese identity in Malaya as opportunistic, untrustworthy, materialistic and susceptible to communist tendencies. The artworks may be viewed as a conjunctural response to the crisis within British Malaya after the war. These artists highlighted the inequalities of the colonial regime at a time when it was vulnerable and saw a possible path towards transformation that would lead to independence. Their anti-colonial stance and alignment with the other ethnic communities was consistently demonstrated through the repeating of non-communal themes in subject matter based on the working classes. As counter narratives, these artworks can thus be seen as strategies employed by a diasporic community to gain political agency and reconstruct Chinese identity within the Malayan nationalistic discourse.