ABSTRACT

The thesis is an investigation into issues of cultural hybridity. It represents an other to the projected cultural model of the official four racial categories by the State in forestalling a national identity. When embracing hybridity, there is no need to project and counterfeit an identity; identity becomes a process. The Peranakans, the ethnic group of Chinese and Malay descendant, whose culture is a hybrid of Chinese, Malay and Western influence, is the chosen subject.

Peranakans are created under the British colonial period as the native comprador class: cultivated to mediate between the colonial power and its Chinese subject. Characterised by an in-betweeness, they hover at the periphery of the two. The Peranakan Museum is used as a vehicle to explore the politics and poetics of its hybridity. The thesis investigates into the Peranakan’s process of identity formation with the intention of representing the process of identity formation. Yet, more than a narration of history, the project is the emblem of the recognition of the otherness within oneself. It reveals the paradoxes of the colonial situation and articulates the colonial desires. It also challenges the transparency of the human agent at the crisis of production, revealing its discursive ambivalence that makes the ‘political’ possible.

The Peranakan Museum inserts itself at the interstices of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce (representative of the now politically correct Chineseness) and the colonial landscape (now representative of the institutional power). The architectural poetics arises out of the association and switching between locations of Chinese/ Western, Power/ Subject, traditional/ modern, characteristic of Peranakan’s process of identity formation.