

Narrating Cold Wars

Hong Kong Baptist University

Conference dates: 11–12 November 2021

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Deadline: 1 July 2021

We invite proposals for a multidisciplinary conference critically examining “Cold War” thinking, both historically and as a construct for understanding contemporary global rivalries. In particular, we are keen to include papers that critically examine and problematize Cold War narratives; their production and circulation among foreign policy professionals as well as in academia, media, and culture; their broader influence on contemporary ways of thinking; and their continued use in the 21st century. Especially welcome are interdisciplinary papers that draw connections among fields such as international relations, international communications studies, journalism, cinema and television studies, cultural studies, and the visual arts.

The year 2021 marks the 30th anniversary of the end of the Cold War, a half-century of superpower rivalry whose effects were profoundly felt in nearly every part of the world. Hardly anyone had predicted the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the peaceful end of the Cold War. And yet, the celebratory spectacle of 1991 spurred attempts to produce a master-narrative that could make sense of the often bewildering events of the previous decades. The most noted among these was political scientist Francis Fukuyama’s “end of history” thesis, which triumphantly announced the victory of capitalist liberal democracy over competing ideologies, chief among which was communism.

Similarly, academic historians were re-energized to produce a master-narrative that could not only give satisfactory shape, direction, and purpose to the events of the previous decades, but also provide scaffolding to make sense of the vast amount of new evidence, such as freshly released archival materials and published memoirs, which would soon become publicly available. Historiographical debates, which flourished and were fuelled by the events of the Cold War, came full circle as orthodox accounts that had blamed Soviet political and ideological expansionism for the Cold War and its worst excesses started to prevail again over revisionist and New Left efforts to shift the object of blame onto the hegemonic project of United States imperialism and its pre-eminence in global capitalism. The end of history, it seemed, had arrived. And the victors were eager to claim its definitive authorship.

But the political and historical impetus to unify a narrative for the Cold War at its conclusion also triggered divergent new lines of interdisciplinary, theoretically informed, methodologically eclectic, and self-reflexive enquiry, whose modes of analysis range from the technical to the moral and to the aesthetic. A more diverse scholarship surrounding the Cold War has sought to dislodge it from the preoccupations of national security interests, geo-strategic power play, grand ideological conflict, political leadership, political regime typology, and military technology at the heart of more conventional approaches in international relations and historical fields of study, giving more space to questions of psychology, beliefs, sentiments, (popular) culture, the arts, media, communications, new technology, and domestic politics including the politics of race, gender, sexuality, and class. For instance, it is often popular culture, through its non-institutionalized narratives, that inspires reflection on mainstream historical narratives, in which historical moments can be re-thought in entirely new perspectives that notice people, movements, ideas, practices, and events outside and

beyond the dominant narrative. This is an acknowledgment of the sheer complexity of the Cold War and the gross inadequacy of linear causal thinking for making sense of it.

Beyond refreshing our understanding of the old US-Soviet Cold War, these multiple lines of scholarship can also help illuminate contemporary rivalries, most obviously between the US and China, but also in numerous regional arenas. This conference seeks to critically examine these and other emerging spaces of enquiry, including but not limited to fields such as international relations, international communications studies, journalism, cinema and television studies, cultural studies, and the visual arts. It will explore how Cold War narratives and their tropes have been constructed, circulated, mobilised, made sense of, and contested, especially through academia, media, and culture. The conference will focus on how these narratives persist in framing elite and popular understandings of the contemporary world.

The topics include, but are not limited to:

- Revisiting the “end of history” thesis, 30 years on
- Contemporary neoliberalism, authoritarian populism, and social protest as legacies of the Cold War
- Superpower rivalry and its impact on small and middle powers: US hegemony; US—China competition; China’s Belt and Road initiative
- Chinese perspectives on the technology wars (including 5G), global pandemic, and other contemporary issues
- Soft power, smart power, sharp power
- (Post) Cold War propaganda: News, documentaries, cinema, television, social media, visual culture
- The language of the Cold War: Narrative form, structure, tropes, vocabularies, visuality
- Comparative media systems and cultures: Beyond “Four Theories” thinking
- The production of Cold War scholarship: Academic and research institutions, the funding of research programmes, academic journals and presses, disciplinary gatekeepers
- Cold War sources: Archives, memoirs, espionage and secret intelligence, and their popularisation
- Asian (and, in particular, Hong Kong) experiences and perspectives in Cold War scholarship
- Third Cinema: Cold War violence, genocide, trauma
- Popular culture and the re-imagination of historical events
- Cold War technologies and the transformation of everyday life
- The space race and other Cold War spectacles of human achievement vs. contemporary decadence, exhaustion, and despair
- The nuclear dimension: Arms race, ecological destruction, clean energy, sustainability
- Complexity: Future analysis, narrating plausible futures, anticipatory thinking and capabilities, resilience
- War games, simulation, virtual reality, robotics, and visual art

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Please email proposals to cmcr@hkbu.edu.hk by 1 July 2021.

Individual paper proposals must include:

- Title of paper
- Abstract (300 to 500 words), which should include a clear explanation of how the paper fits the conference theme, its central argument(s), and a summary of its substance
- Authors’ names, academic/professional affiliations, 50-100-word bios, and email addresses

GRADUATE STUDENTS

We are very keen to receive proposals from graduate students. Travel subsidies are available for selected paper presenters. There will be a “Best Paper” award.

PUBLICATION

The organising committee includes the editors of Global Media and Communication (Daya Thussu) and Global Storytelling: Journal of Digital and Moving Image (Prof Zhu). Selected presenters will be invited to submit their papers to special sections in these two journals, or to an edited volume for the Routledge book series edited by Thussu, Internationalizing Media Studies or Advances in Internationalizing Media Studies.

ORGANISERS

This conference is organised by a multidisciplinary group of researchers at Hong Kong Baptist University, including scholars of media and communication, film studies, cultural studies, visual arts, and political science.

Global Communication & Power Research Cluster, School of Communication

Professor Cherian George
Asst Professor Mateja Kovacic
Professor Kenneth Paul Tan
Professor Daya Thussu
Professor Ying Zhu

Department of Government & International Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences

Professor Jean-Pierre Cabestan
Professor Alistair Cole

Academy of Visual Arts

Assoc Professor Noit Banai

QUERIES?

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