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Listening to Australia: Radio Australia in East and Southeast Asia, 1950-1960

This paper addresses the construction of Asian audiences in the 1950s and 60s in relation to the Australian Broadcasting Commission's operations in Asia. In particular it will look at the development of Asian language broadcasts (especially Mandarin and Indonesian), on Radio Australia, the Commission's international broadcaster. It has been said that Radio Australia has the largest audience of any radio broadcasting station in Australia. Yet its international remit tends to be create a blind spot for media studies in Australia. One reason for this is the way in which Radio Australia complicates 'methodological nationalism', which tends to be the dominant analytical mode for Australian media history. In oral histories of Australians working in the organisation they talk of the unique problem of speaking to non-Australian audiences about national issues. The ABC also made extensive efforts to plumb how often 'Asia' listened to Australia as well as establishing an extensive 'listening post' system to listen to, in particular, China. These developments will be traced through ABC archival documents and research and oral history interviews. The research has been conducted for and Australian Research Council Discovery Grant.