ABSTRACT

Much work has been published regarding the success of Chinese capitalism in East and Southeast Asia in the last three decades. There are two schools of thought on this important and extensive topic of how Chinese business people operate their businesses. The “cultural” school, which places an emphasis on the importance of culture, ethnicity and business networks, is being challenged by the structuralists who call attention to the role of the state and the importance of political patronage. While these two groups have contributed to a large extent to the understanding of Chinese capitalism, their approaches are fragmented in nature and do not fully explain how Chinese entrepreneurs expanded and adapted themselves in a structural-historical context. This article looks at the question of Malaysian Chinese entrepreneurship by combining considerations of structure and agency over time.