

2. Chinese-Language Newspapers in Malaya

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2

Chinese-Language Newspapers in Malaya

For the first ten years following the end of World War II, the Chinese-language newspapers published in Malaya referred to China as their “homeland” and gave events in China equal, if not more, importance than local Malayan affairs. This fact will be immediately apparent to anyone who opens up any such newspaper published at the time and peruses the headlines. Even the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) organ, *Min Sheng Pao*, referred to China as “our homeland” (at least up through April 1948; it was banned that June, and I have not had the opportunity to check the May and June issues), as did the China Democratic League’s (CDL) *Nan Chiau Jit Pao* and *Xian Dai Ri Bao* (both banned in September 1950). During their postwar existence, both also used the expression “our country” for China.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to ascertain how long the general commercial newspapers, such as *Nanyang Siang Pau*, which stayed politically neutral with a slight tilt toward the Kuomintang until the early 1950s, and *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, a Kuomintang supporter until the early 1950s, began to refer to Malaya and Singapore as “the homeland” and “our country,” or when they ceased using the terms in reference to China. However, an important watershed in the usage of the terms can be seen in a short essay that was printed in the October 7, 1957 issue of *Nanyang Siang Pau* and entitled “Woguo yu Zhongguo zhi bie” [The difference between our country and China]. It was authored by Dang Xiong, who wrote,

After reading Mr. Xin Hua’s essay in the September 25 issue, entitled “Guoyu

keyi gaicheng huayu” [We should change the term “national language” to “Chinese”], I was confronted with a similar problem The Merdeka [national independence] celebration of August 31 (for the Federation of Malaya) changed completely the political terminology used in Malaya up until that time. First, the two terms “our country” and “China” present a problem that needs to be settled by the Chinese residents of Malaya as soon as possible. A month before the celebration, a Malayan Chinese referring to China as “our country” would not have caused any misunderstanding, but from Merdeka day onward, Malaya, the place of permanent residence for Malayan Chinese, became a sovereign nation. From now on we should call Malaya “our country,” not China.

From now on, we must make a clear distinction between “our country” and China; and by establishing such a viewpoint, we will be able to eliminate any misunderstanding that may arise among our Malay compatriots and rifts we may have with them. Calling glorious Malaya “our country” is only common sense and the correct path to take. Furthermore, our national founding father is no longer Dr. Sun Yat-sen, but Prime Minister Tengku Abdul Rahman [first premier of the Federation of Malaya]. Our “national portrait” is no longer a Chinese picture scroll, but rather a *batik sarong* work of art. Our “national language” is no longer Mandarin, but Malay, the language spoken by Malays. Our “national products” are no longer items manufactured in China, but Malayan products, like rubber and tin. In other words, we should place the term “national” before all the things that are representative of Malaya. The character for “country” is not the “guo” in Zhongguo [China]; it is the “Federation” of Malaya.

Certainly it should not be concluded that before this short essay was printed, “our country” referred exclusively to China within the Malayan Chinese community, and after it appeared, the term switched completely to Malaya; however, it is certain that the views expressed by Dang Xiong are an important indicator showing a definite Malayan identity consciousness having come to the fore by this time among the region’s Chinese language newspapers, their readers, and within the Chinese community in general.

On March 18, 1956 the Grand Rally of Literators Responding to the Independence Movement appealed for a patriotic movement pursuing the Malayan independence of Malayan Chinese.¹ On April 27 of that year, one thousand people representing 454 Chinese organizations gathered together to hold the Representatives’ Congress of All Malayan Registered Guilds and Associations to ratify a declaration demanding Malayan citizenship.² Both events suggest that the 1956–57 period marks the era when Malayan identity among the country’s Chinese residents became firmly established.

Although it is not possible to go into a detailed account of how the meaning of such terms as *zuguo* (land of our ancestors) and *guguo* (homeland) changed in Chinese newspapers, we can look at the transition to the Western

TABLE 2-1
THE ADOPTION OF THE WESTERN CALENDAR
BY CHINESE NEWSPAPERS IN MALAYA

<i>Nan Chiau Jit Pao</i>	October 4, 1949
<i>Xian Dai Ri Bao</i>	October 4, 1949, the evening edition (October 5, 1949 for the morning edition)
<i>Sin Chew Jit Poh</i>	October 20, 1949
<i>Nanyang Siang Pau</i>	January 7, 1950 (Corresponds to the day on which the United Kingdom officially recognized the PRC.)

Source : The author.

calendar dating system that took place in their dateline headings and at the changes that took place in publication holidays, and we can check to see how long correspondents continued to be dispatched to China. All these point toward the Malayanization of these newspapers.

I. Issue Dating

Following the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912, the Malayan Chinese newspapers adopted the Republic of China calendar, which marked 1912 as “the first year of the republic.” Then after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) on October 1, 1949, the *Nan Chiau Jit Pao*, a CCP supporter, did away with the republican calendar and adopted the Western system on October 4. The *Sin Chew Jit Poh* followed suit a little later in the month, while the *Nanyang Siang Pau* waited until the United Kingdom’s official recognition of the PRC before it switched over to the Western system (see Table 2-1). Even the newspapers that supported the Kuomintang were unable to continue their anti-CCP editorial positions, probably due to the fact that (1) loyalty to the nationalists lost its meaning after the Kuomintang government was confined to the island of Taiwan, and (2) the papers desired the patronage of readers most of whom were originally from such areas as Fujian and Guangdong, which had changed hands from nationalist to PRC governance.

However, this move away from the “republic” dating system does not necessarily indicate increasing disinterest in Chinese affairs, because it is clear that the newspapers adopted the Western system because the PRC had done so. Moreover, the terms “homeland” and “our country” continued as before to refer to China.

TABLE 2-2 (Continued)

Holiday Name	Publication Holiday Date	1949	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66
Memorial Day of the Union of Chinese Printing Workers	August 28								(Ag 27)										
Publication holiday	August 28																		
Chinese Journalists' Day	September 2			(S 1)	a		?												
Chinese Newspapers' Journalists' Day	September 2																		c (S 1)
Double Tenth	October 11				a			d	d	d									
Publication holiday	October 11					(O 10)													(O 20) (O 23)
Founding Father's Birthday	November 13																		(N 12)
Publication holiday	November 13																		(N 8)
Christmas Day	December 26																		

Source : The author.

Notes : 1. Ordinarily the publication holiday would fall on the day after the commemorative day.

2. The dates in parentheses designate exceptions.

3. The symbol indicates one day off; indicates two days off.

^a The reason for the publication holiday (i.e., the commemorative holiday name) was not included in the publication holiday announcement.

^b The announcement of the publication holiday substituted the words "Dr. Sun Yat-sen" for "Founding Father."

^c This day may correspond to the commemoration of the independence of the Federation of Malaya.

^d The announcement of the publication holiday did not contain the words, "National Celebration."

II. Publication Holidays

Table 2–2 traces the changes that took place in newspaper publication holidays between 1949 and 1966, and Table 2–3 shows the situation as of 1990.

The thirteen days (eleven occasions) on which publication holidays were observed in 1949 included six days (six occasions) related specifically to China (excluding Chinese New Year): the Passing of the Founding Father (Dr. Sun Yat-sen), Huang Hua Day (commemorating the Huang Hua Gang Uprising of March 28, 1911), Confucius' Birthday (in conjunction with Teachers' Day), the Double Tenth, and the Founding Father's Birthday. In short, half of holidays related to China.

The first of these holidays to disappear was Huang Hua Day in 1950, which reappeared briefly in 1960 as an anonymous "regularly scheduled publication holiday," then disappeared again for good in 1961.

The next to disappear was the publication holiday on the day after Confucius' Birthday/Teachers' Day celebrated on August 27. This holiday was removed in 1953, probably due to the fact that in 1950 the PRC established a Teachers' Day on June 6,³ and in 1951 the Federation of Malaya designated a similar day on October 21.⁴ In 1958 Singapore established a Teachers' Day on October 9,⁵ then changed it to August 31. But the occasion did not merit a publication holiday in either Singapore or Malaya. However, August 28 continued as a publication holiday under the name Memorial Day of the Union of Chinese Printing Workers, indicating perhaps some negative sentiments toward the country of China. Later, in 1958, the name of the day was again changed to a "regularly scheduled newspaper holiday," possibly, like Huang Hua Day, due to fears about some connotation of ties to China. In 1960 the day was completely removed from the publication holiday schedule.

Chinese Journalists Day became Chinese-Language Newspaper Journalists Day in 1956 and was removed altogether in 1961, although a "regularly scheduled publication holiday" was observed one day earlier on September 1. This latter holiday disappeared in 1962 either.

From 1955, the announcement of a publication holiday on the occasion of the Double Tenth excluded the words "*guoqing*" (national celebration), then in 1958 it became a "regularly scheduled publication holiday," and finally disappeared in 1960, as did the commemoration of Dr. Sun Yat-sen's birth and death.

In this way Malayan Chinese newspaper publication holidays which in the early years after the war had matched China's commemorative holidays, began to remove specific commemorative names in the mid-1950s. Their veiled

TABLE 2-3
PUBLICATION HOLIDAYS OF PRESENT-DAY CHINESE NEWSPAPERS IN MALAYA, 1989, 1990

Holiday Name	Publication Holiday Date	Malaysia	Singapore	
		1990	1989	1990
New Year's Day	January 2			
Chinese New Year	Late January or early February			
Hari Raya	A day in February and March			
Labour Day	May 2			
Newspaper Deliverers' Day	June 14			
Deepavali	October 25			
Christmas Day	December 26			

Source : The author.

Note : The symbol indicates one day off; indicates two days off.

and increasing anonymity before they were completely removed in 1962 indicates a clear intent by the newspapers to avoid any connotation concerning ties to China or even to deny such ties altogether. Together with concern about the feelings of Malays, such actions also document the establishment of a Malayan identity consciousness in the Malayan Chinese community. The transition that was taking place in the holidays of the Chinese newspaper industry during the late 1950s matches with the years 1956-57 which mark the establishment of Malayan identity within the general Chinese community in other aspects that have been mentioned.

As shown in Table 2-3, today the yearly Chinese newspaper publication holiday schedule contains nothing that could be construed as connected with China. Although the Memorial Day of the Newspaper Deliverers' Association established around 1950 has been revived in Malaysia as Newspaper Deliverers' Day, there is no connotation concerning China. Transformation of publication holidays thus symbolizes well the transition that has taken place in the identity consciousness of the Chinese from China- to Malaya-oriented.

III. News Correspondents in China

The following is a list of the names and locations of special correspondents—*tepai* (Malayan Chinese journalists on assignment; SpC), stationed correspondents—*zhuzai* (probably journalists who had returned to China permanently; StC), specially contracted correspondents—*teyue* (probably native Chinese

journalists; SCC) dispatched or hired by the *Nanyan Siang Pau* in 1950.

Wu Li (StC)	Xiamen
Di Ya (StC)	Fujian or Fuzhou
Shu Ping (StC), Tie Min (StC)	Shantou
Ying Zhi (SpC), Gong Bo (SCC), Xing Guang (?)	Guangzhou
Xiang Dong (SpC), Yi Xing (StC)	Guangdong
Chen Ping (SCC), Meng Bo (StC)	Hainan
Wang Can Bao (SpC), Wang Li Shen (SpC)	Shanghai
Zhong Heng (StC)	Nanjing
Ding Ming (SCC)	(unknown)

This list tells us that the *Nanyang Siang Pau* had a total of fifteen journalists—four special correspondents, seven stationed correspondents, and four specially contracted correspondents—active in China in 1950, one year after the establishment of the PRC. It is unclear how many of these reporters made a living solely as employees of the *Nanyan Siang Pau* (probably very few even among the special correspondents); however, for a newspaper with a circulation of about 100,000 copies⁶ to dispatch and hire that many reporters to cover one country, that country must have had a very special place in its editorial policy. There is no doubt that the *Nanyan Siang Pau* at that time had a readership with a very strong China-oriented interest, a group without which the paper could not have existed.

We know very little about the journalists listed above. Chen Ping was the name of the Malayan Communist Party secretary general at the time, but they could not have been the same people. Tie Min may have been Lee Tiat Min (Li Tie Min; 1897–1956), who was a secretary to Tan Kah Kee (Chen Jia Geng), returned with Tan to China, and became the first vice-president of the All China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese; but there is no way of knowing for sure.

In 1951 Bi You Ji was hired as a stationed correspondent in Fujian, Hua Wei was dispatched as a special correspondent to Fujian, and Lei Yu was added to the Fujian staff as a contract correspondent. Shu Ping in Shantou seemed to have moved to Taiwan, given the articles he wrote concerning his travels there.

From 1950 to 1952, several articles a month written by correspondents stationed in China filled the pages of the *Nanyan Siang Pau*; however, in 1953, the number of articles submitted from China had dwindled to about once in two months; and only Ying Zhi and Hua Wei remained employed as

China-based correspondents. Ying's last article, a report on the discovery of an ancient tumulus in suburban Guangzhou, appeared on November 2 of that year, while Hua's last contribution on a lantern festival to celebrate a bumper harvest in Fuzhou appeared on March 9 of the following year, marking the last time an article written by a reporter stationed in China would be published by the *Nanyan Siang Pau*. The articles that appeared thereafter were written by China watchers and experts in Malaya or Hong Kong, or merely translated from English-language reports written by Westerners.

In September 1956 the Singapore-Malaya Foreign Trade Mission, headed by the chairman of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce, Ko Teck Kin (Gao De Gen), visited China at the invitation of the PRC government. The news reporters that accompanied the group covered the conference that the group held with Prime Minister Zhou Enlai (at which Zhou urged overseas Chinese to try their best to acquire citizenship in their countries of residence),⁷ the conference held with Tan Kah Kee,⁸ and articles on what the trade mission actually got to see.⁹

A report by Cao Ju Ren about the mission's attendance at National Day festivities in Beijing on October 1, 1956 appeared in the pages of the *Nanyan Siang Pau* on October 10th, and his account of the mission's travels in Zhejiang during October of the following year appeared in the same paper from October 2 through 8, 1957; however, it is not clear what Cao's relationship to the newspaper was.

While trade between China and Malaya (Malaysia and Singapore) continued, exchanges between newspaper reporters stopped. The reason for the cessation lies mainly with the Malayan side of the connection. The disappearance of reporters stationed in China and the corresponding devaluation by the Malayan Chinese newspapers of the newsworthiness of the China scene that occurred in the mid-1950s is very significant, in that this aspect also closely matches the 1956–57 transition to a Malaya-oriented identity consciousness in the local overseas Chinese community as a whole.

Not until May 1994, nineteen year after the establishment of official diplomatic relations between Malaysia and China, would there be the reappearance of a China-based news reporter working for the *Nanyan Siang Pau*. Kheu Chow Fooi (Qiu Zhao Fei), a visiting research fellow since 1992 in the Chinese Literature Department at Nanjing University, began sending reports as the newspaper's "special correspondent."¹⁰

Notes

- 1 Miao Xiu, ed., *Xin Ma huawen wenxue daxi* [General collection of Chinese literature of Singapore and Malaysia], vol. 1, *Rirun* [Theory] (Singapore: Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1971), p. 316.
- 2 Chui Kwei Chiang, *Xin Ma huaren guojia rentong de zhuanxiang, 1945–1959* [Change of national identity among Chinese in Singapore and Malaysia, 1945–1959] (Xiamen: Xiamen Daxue Chubanshe, 1989), pp. 334–36. *Nanyan Siang Pau*, April 27, April 28, and April 29, 1956. These articles were received from Professor Chui.
- 3 *Nan Chiau Jit Pao*, June 7, 1950. The Singapore Chinese School Teachers' Association also celebrated Teacher's Day on this date by holding a gathering during the afternoon; and another gathering was also sponsored by the Mayfair Musical and Drama Society in the evening. However, this date was not a news publication holiday.
- 4 *Nan Chiau Jit Pao*, October 21, 1951.
- 5 *Nan Chiau Jit Pao*, October 3, 1958.
- 6 *Nan Chiau Jit Pao*, November 12, 1956.
- 7 *Nan Chiau Jit Pao*, October 4 and October 18, 1958; *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, October 4 and October 5, 1956.
- 8 *Nan Chiau Jit Pao*, October 1, 1956; *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, October 13, 1956.
- 9 *Nan Chiau Jit Pao*, October 2, 1956.
- 10 *Nan Chiau Jit Pao*, May 26, 1993.