

Chinese Identity in Chinese Language Newspapers in Malaysia Before World War II

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Abstract: Although the Nanyang (Southeast Asia) Chinese with a strong sense of expatriation were miles away from home, they were concerned about the future of China's development through the common language of their homeland and information about the domestic political situation, and gathered a Chinese national consciousness and a sense of identity towards the national culture, which became an important pillar of the development force of the Nanyang Chinese community. The Sin Kuo Min Press published in 1919 propagated revolutionary ideas, the Three Principles of the People, North-South unification, democracy and republicanism, science and democracy and freedom to achieve salvation and survival, and was the first to use vernacular language, which promoted the Chinese identity and patriotic sentiment of seeking national revitalization among the Nanyang Chinese.

Keywords: Chinese language newspaper; Sin Kuo Min Press; Chinese complex.

1. Introduction

Chinese language newspapers build the information space and bridge for Chinese in Malaysia through common language and culture. Chinese newspapers, Chinese communities and Chinese schools in the Chinese community are the triumvirate that supports the development of the Chinese community, writing out the Chinese national cultural identity with Chinese characters, uniting the Chinese with Chinese communities to unite the development force, and inheriting the Chinese national civilization with Chinese schools.

2. The Historical Background of the Sin Kuo Min Press

The Sin Kuo Min Press was launched on October 1, 1919, in Singapore, with Xie Wenjin as the manager, Xue Muben as the treasurer and Zhang Shunai as the editor-in-chief. Influenced by the May Fourth New Culture Movement, the Sin Kuo Min Press propagated various revolutionary ideas about the country, the nation and the people, such as maintaining national unity, disaster relief, resistance to invasion, resistance to exploitation, women's liberation, and education for the common people. Although the Nanyang Chinese had left the Chinese homeland, but their cultural consciousness, way of thinking and psychological quality were still marked by Chinese style consciousness and cognition, and there was always a gap in their hearts. They learned about China's domestic affairs and political current situation through newspapers, indirectly participated in the development of China's political and cultural changes, and contributed their political, economic and cultural strengths, which reflected and enhanced the sense of identity of Chinese culture and identity among the Nanyang Chinese.

3. The Patriotic and National Mission of the Sin Kuo Min Press

3.1. Support for the Republic and the Three Principles of the People

In the History of the Struggle of this Press, it is mentioned that the Sin Kuo Min Press was founded because: "overseas Chinese, who were thousands of miles away from their country, were unable to understand the truth of the national affairs, especially in Nanyang Chinese, and the comrades of the Tung Meng Hui (Chinese United League) Penang Branch were quite worried"[1]. This newspaper is organized for the Chinese nationals who support the pure republican ideology to represent the pure republican nation's speech, to promote the republican theory, to promote Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles of the People such as "Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Letter to Comrades in Overseas Ports"[2], so as to arouse the national consciousness of overseas Chinese.

3.2. Evocation of patriotic feelings and inspiration the morale of the South Seas

By constantly reporting on the current situation in China, the Sin Kuo Min Press guided the development of public opinion on the patriotic consciousness among the Nanyang Chinese, so that the Nanyang Chinese would awaken towards their consciousness of being Chinese nationals. "[3] The nation of a strong nation is backed by the state, so that no one dares to insult them wherever they go. The nation of a weak nation, without the protection of the State, will be bullied wherever they go." By knowing the development and changes in their home country, the Nanyang Chinese were allowed to envision the situation they were in and the close relationship between their treatment and the country, and always evoked the patriotic feelings of the them and made them never forget their Chinese bloodline and culture. At the same time, each year, there was a column set up to publish articles for the commemoration of the 72 martyrs of Huanghuagang, the Double Ten Day activities, the death and birth anniversary of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, etc., so that the Nanyang Chinese would not

forget the revolutionary martyrs who died for their country and their identity as a Chinese.

3.3. Promotion of social reform

Founded at the time of the May Fourth Cultural Movement, the Sin Kuo Min Press: used science and democracy to eradicate feudal superstition and bad social habits; advocated equality between men and women and freedom of marriage to oppose the feudal family system; advocated human rights and equality to break class exploitation and inequality; encouraged the establishment of industries to develop the economic strength of the Nanyang Chinese for a strong country and a truly democratic, equal and free Chinese society; and actively promoted various social innovation movements in Nanyang. It was necessary to break with the old and establish the new, to implement new ideas and improve the social system. For example, "On the Reasons for the Underdevelopment of Chinese Science"[4] in the Science column pointed out that the shortcomings of Chinese scientific research were that "the Chinese people tend to keep secrets and never teach them to outsiders until they are lost", and that if we could catch up quickly, we would be able to become teachers; In "The Spirit and Life of the New Cultural Movement" [5], it is mentioned that a social revolution requires the removal of all obstacles to progress and the development of science and national philosophy; a special section on women's world and education was created to discuss issues such as the socialization of men and women and arranged marriages.

4. The Attention to Chinese Society and the Overseas Chinese

4.1. World News

The main purpose of the international news (foreign news) was "to see how things will develop from the first small beginnings, to know the trend of Big Powers and national relations, so as to arouse the world knowledge of our compatriots." [6] The political orientation of the Sin Kuo Min Press determined that its main contents were news and information reports favorable to the revolutionary party, and each issue contained domestic and foreign news. It involved foreign diplomatic acts related to China, for example, the "Japan's New Policy towards Manchuria and Mongolia" [7], the "Action of the Japanese Army in Jinan" [8], all revealed the aggressive policies of Britain, France, Japan, the United States, Germany, Russia and other imperialist countries in China for the right of way, mining and taxation.

4.2. Domestic News of China

This Press adhered to the principle that news concerns the fate of the country, and that the newspaper media shall be used to monitor the government and to arouse the awareness of the people. In response to domestic political events at the time, such as the Boxer Indemnity, the Gold Franc Controversy, the Lu Case, and the May 30th Movement. It reported the major social news in China. It reported on the politics and diplomacy during the Beijing government, the National Revolution and the Northern Expedition War, the Northern Expedition of the Nationalist Party, the Great Unification of the North-South War, and the internal division and struggle of the Nationalist Party, and the political and economic policies of the Nationalist Party. Based on the fact that Nanyang Chinese mostly come from the southeast coast of Guangzhou,

Fujian, Hainan, etc., regional pages of Guangdong Highlights and Fujian Highlights, allowed Nanyang Chinese to establish ties with the development of their hometowns in China, to fill the homesickness of overseas Chinese, and to strengthen their patriotic feelings.

4.3. Local News

The local news was mainly about the social news of the local Chinese, which involved social changes and customs to promote the development of good social customs. Such as "The Prevention of Cholera Disease" [9] for health and hygiene education; the 1920 Education Regulations in the British Channel Colony [10], which analyzed the local policies and comments related to Chinese in the colony. The news information related to the Chinese in the surrounding countries of the Nanyang including Surabaya, Kundian, Vietnam, Myanmar, Siam, Penang, Ipoh, Hoa Phong, Batavia and other areas. For example, "The Situation of Overseas Chinese in the Philippines in the Last Three Centuries" [11] which introduced the trade of Chinese in various parts of the Philippine Islands in the late Ming Dynasty, to supported Chinese language education in Nanyang and introduced the development of Chinese schools.

4.4. Literary and Art Supplement

The literary and art supplement is a text that aids interest with poetry sketches, novels, and harmonious texts. Although playful and allegorical, it also contains truths and speaks of patriotism in easy-to-understand words. The literary and art supplements, included more than thirty editions of literary and art supplements such as Women's World, Poetry World and Drama World, among which the National New Paper Supplement is considered to be the beginning of the vernacular Chinese literature of Malaysia. It mainly promoted the new ideas, new science and new theories of the May Fourth Cultural Movement and enlightened modern democratic thinking, both in the old literary style and in the vernacular, and the literary styles of fiction, poetry, essays and drama were mostly creative, showing the diversity of literature. There was also a section for entertainment, which introduced the content of movies, knowledge of ancient coins, Chinese martial arts, and Chinese paintings to enrich the daily life of Nanyang Chinese. It can be said to be all-embracing, which enabled Chinese culture to be widely spread in Nanyang.

4.5. Social Review

Each page contained social reviews on social events to express their views, to promote revolutionary republican ideas and the Three Principles of the People, to oppose royalist activities; to promote the development of Chinese language education; to inspire love for the motherland and the homeland, and to transform patriotic feelings into practical actions; to promote the progress of the Chinese community with the hope that the Chinese community can improve their abilities and qualities, so as to develop the Chinese social power. Some were concerned about the social education and development reform of overseas Chinese, such as Lin Dubu's "Local Autonomy and Overseas Chinese" [12], which advocated that overseas Chinese should unite for development and support patriotism with the development of their own strength.

4.6. Advertisement

The Sin Kuo Min Press provided information on the products of Chinese stores, including tobacco, alcohol, Chinese medicine, rubber, catering, department store retail, tools, car and boat rental, etc., all of which were closely related to the daily life of Chinese people. For example, cigarette advertisements are exquisitely illustrated, mostly with classical Chinese beauty and the charm of Republican women. In terms of advertisements, it focused on the development of Chinese language education and Chinese language schools in Nanyang, for example, it published an advertisement of collecting donations of Nanyang Overseas Chinese High School in Singapore, to promote the cause of Chinese education.

5. The Promotion of Chinese Identity in Nanyang Chinese society

5.1. Inherit and develop the cultural identity of traditional Chinese culture

It promoted the creation of Nanyang Chinese literature. Living abroad would inevitably be influenced by the local language and culture, and the level of Chinese culture and Chinese consciousness of their children and grandchildren would be very different from that of the first generation. The Sin Kuo Min Press advocated the use of vernacular Chinese, actively discussed the development of Chinese schools and offered suggestions for reform. For example, "Chinese Text and Language"[13] proposed standards for the annotated script and the training of teachers; and helped to keep the development of Chinese text and language in Nanyang. Influenced by the May Fourth New Culture Movement, the representative figures and works of the New Culture Movement were introduced, including Chen Duxiu, Hu Shih, Liang Qichao, Wu Zhihui, Guo Moruo, Bing Xin and Lu Xun, etc. Its literary supplements such as New National Magazine mostly used vernacular Chinese to write realistic novels, lyrical poems and fables and other literary content, and the easy-to-understand language made it easier for poor Nanyang Chinese such as workers and small traders to learn and write Chinese characters, which reserved new strength for the future development of the Nanyang Chinese.

5.2. The promotion of the national identity of Chinese

The Sin Kuo Min Press published the bourgeois revolutions of the world, the Wars of Independence and the history of the fall of various countries, and propagated the modern Western nationalist ideology. It reported on the social situation in China, opposed the rule of the Beiyang Government, actively promoted the ideology of the Three Principles of the People, advocated anti-Japanese salvation, and at the same time actively used the resources of overseas Chinese to raise funds and support the national revolution at home. It boldly exposed and criticized the corruption and misdeeds of local warlords, and presented the weakness and incompetence of the Beiyang government and the people's lack of livelihood in an all-round and multi-dimensional manner, as well as the dedication and sacrifice for the democratic revolution and democratic politics. In the midst of the thought confusion of finding the way to save the country, it gave the Nanyang Chinese a more diverse and objective perspective by conducting polemical debates, enlightened the modern thinking of the Nanyang

Chinese, inspired the general public to aspire for a new life in the future and awakened their national consciousness, and actively supported the Chinese revolution politically and economically.

5.3. The promotion of social reform among Nanyang Chinese

Many Chinese intellectuals went to Nanyang, spreading new ideas and promoting social change consciously, and sowed the seeds of "democracy" and "science". The Sin Kuo Min Press actively propagated the thoughts of May Fourth and new thoughts, and its ideas of promoting women's emancipation, prohibiting prostitution, smoking and gambling promoted the improvement of social habits of the Nanyang Chinese; the promotion of Chinese language education, popular education, and fighting for equal rights for the Chinese to promote the development of Chinese trade and commerce all achieved partial success. Firstly, the Chinese in Malaysia, due to their social environment, were more receptive to western modern ideas, and the newspapers were more receptive towards the propaganda of democracy, equality, women's rights and the right to receive education than those in the semi-colonial and semi-feudal Chinese society at that time, and there were fewer obstacles to their implementation. Secondly, the Sin Kuo Min Press was mainly aimed at the Chinese merchants and intellectuals in Nanyang, who were more willing to improve the society and strengthen the power of Chinese to maintain the development of Chinese in Nanyang. Thirdly, the promotion of Chinese community organizations and the British government at that time, who wanted to establish a more modern and civilized society to reduce the inconvenience caused by cultural differences, to promote the development of the Chamber of Commerce, to fight for more rights for the Chinese where they belonged, and to protect the rights and interests of the Chinese as well as their lives and property.

5.4. The satisfaction of homesickness and patriotism

Chinese language newspapers established a spatial connection between different regions through the media, conveyed the spiritual pillar for overseas Chinese like a letter from home, thus enhancing the connection of Nanyang Chinese to China, as well as their patriotism and love for people; On the other hand, it can make up for the cultural loss of being in a foreign country, and build a Chinese public opinion exchange space society. It included not only on the transmission of information but also on the maintenance and development of culture, and emphasized that "blood is thicker than water", which was the best link for overseas Chinese to remember their motherland and their homeland, so that they could always remember "I am Chinese". It can be seen often in the names of the main characters of the novels as "Hua", "Zhong" and "Qiang"; Or, they may express their homesickness with things such as the remaining chrysanthemums, the falling geese and the cold cicadas, and use poetry to express their longing for their hometowns. "The heart of a guest is infinitely sentimental at the Double Ninth Festival, looking at the hometown from the top of the building". This kind of deep and profound emotion source was endless. It was a Chinese community built by the Nanyang Chinese with newspapers, which contained the loneliness of being stranded in a foreign country, the ambition of being unfulfilled, the longing for the relatives in the

homeland and the hardship of struggling in a foreign country. At the same time, as the revolutionaries entered Nanyang, they set up newspapers and schools in Nanyang to promote revolutionary ideas and strengthen nationalist sentiments. Especially after the establishment of the government of the Republic of China, the establishment of overseas Chinese affairs agencies of the national government and the implementation of overseas Chinese affairs policies strengthened the identification of overseas Chinese towards the motherland and the national consciousness of "Chinese people".

6. Conclusion

By listening to their native language, reading Chinese newspapers, and writing Chinese characters, they understand where their roots belong. The Nanyang Chinese have gathered a sense of Chinese identity in their national consciousness from a system of common symbols such as words, language, customs, festivals, and food, and by doing so, they have summoned a strong cohesive force and formed solidarity in the Nanyang community to fight for equal rights. As a Chinese language newspaper, the Sin Kuo Min Press has recorded and preserved all that the Nanyang Chinese have done for the country and the revolution. Using the pen as a gun and the text as a rallying cry, the Nanyang Chinese plunged into a smokeless political and cultural battlefield to awaken the patriotism and inspire the Nanyang Chinese with a strong sense of identity of themselves.

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