

The Chinese Newspapers in Bangkok since the Late 1910s until the Early 1930s¹

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Abstract

The difficulty in obtaining the old Chinese newspapers in Siam at the beginning of the twentieth century and the demand for researchers' Chinese reading ability, especially the semi-vernacular Chinese used in the early years of the Republic of China, led to a rarity of Chinese research based on old Chinese newspapers published in Bangkok, despite a plethora of research findings in the study of the Chinese community in Siam. By examining the old Chinese newspapers edited by members of the Siamese Chinese community from the late 1910s to the early 1930s, this article argues that the reading proclivity of Siamese Chinese was a cultural exchange that helped form the Chinese identity in exile. Firstly, the old Chinese newspapers in Siam closely followed domestic political trends and maintained a high level of political sensitivity. Their focus on what was happening in China and around the world, undoubtedly, facilitated the development of self-awareness among the Chinese community. Secondly, as these newspapers reflected, under the influence of mainstream Chinese thoughts, the Siamese Chinese's identity had gradually taken shape, and their political consciousness was awakened.

Keywords

The Chinese Community in Bangkok, Chinese Newspaper, Revolutionary Spirit, Cultural Community

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Introduction

The end of World War II marked a significant shift in the study of overseas Chinese, with a plethora of studies targeting Thai Chinese and a deepening understanding of Thai Chinese. These researches have included overseas Chinese identity cognition, kinship organization, education, religious beliefs, and political and economic roles (Eaksittipong, 2017, p.99). At first glance, it seems difficult for future Chinese researchers to find new research perspectives besides supplementing the missing parts of the aforementioned research findings. Nevertheless, if academia starts to comprehensively examine the Chinese society and the information databases created by generations of scholars, new frontiers could be explored. Evidently, a textual interpretation of the Chinese printing press in Siam is still uncharted.

A few researchers that shed light on the old Siamese Chinese newspapers believe that the main reason for a lack of research on Chinese nationalism in Thailand, especially before World War II, is that Chinese newspapers published in Siam (renamed Thailand after 1939) are not well preserved, and it is quite difficult to obtain sources (Murashima, 2013). In fact, from 29 September 2008, Huachiew Chalermprakiet University (HCU) has cooperated with the National Library of Thailand to conserve Chinese newspapers published in Siam since 1917, including daily and weekly newspapers, through the establishment of a database (TDCN) (HCU, 2016). Daily newspapers such as *Huaxian Xinbao*, *Qi'nan Ribao*, *Meinan Ribao*, and *Zhonghua Minbao* are thereby awaiting to be expounded.

The broadest survey that encompassed these newspapers from 1903 until the present was carried out by Siripanyathiti, Chirachoosakol, and Chatwechsiri (2021). Nevertheless, their study aimed to draw a general picture of these printing presses over a long period, with their adjustment in Thailand's political contexts. Thereby, a detailed analysis of these newspapers was sidelined. In her later studies, Tungkeunkunt believed that these Chinese newspapers exposed the Chinese to a large amount of information, ideas, and images that inscribed the popular culture in the Chinese community (Tungkeunkunt, 2012, p.89). However, since the main focus of her research is the cultural situation of Chinese communities from the 1950s to the 1970s. Still, the earlier Siamese Chinese newspapers become one of the research gaps in the current Siamese Chinese studies.

Siam, as one of the world's regional areas with the largest distribution of overseas Chinese, Chinese community there had long established its own newspaper industry. Since 1880, there have been regular steamships shuttling between Bangkok and Swatow in southern China. Baker's data in *A History of Thailand* showed that between 1882 and 1910, around 1,000,000 Chinese immigrants moved to Siam, with a resident population of 370,000 (Baker & Phongpachit, 2014, p.121). But the earliest appearance of old Chinese newspapers in Siam could be traced back only to the early 20th century. Few researchers believed that

Hanjing Ribao was the oldest Chinese newspaper published in Thailand (for example, Skinner, 1957, p. 274). Based on a news article from the *Bangkok Times* on 6 December 1902, Murashima believed otherwise that the first Chinese-language newspaper was *Meinan Ribao* (Murashima, 2013, p.151).

As newspapers became an important platform for ideological and cultural exchanges between the overseas Chinese community and their motherland (Skinner, 1957; Eaksittipong, 2017; Wongsurawat, 2019). Newspapers that were published in Siam were commonly used among modern Chinese politicians. They had played a significant role in promoting social and political change and in implanting the Chinese culture. In the early twentieth century, to broadcast their political ideals abroad, the royalist and revolutionary factions, both expelled by the Aisin Gioro dynasty, founded several Chinese newspapers in Siam, including *Hanjing Ribao*, *Qinan Ribao*, and *Huaxian Xinbao*. Wongsurawat believed that old Chinese newspapers were a crucial linkage to plant a sense of belonging of the Chinese in Thailand. In other words, newspapers were mouthpieces for the dissemination of political ideas and a platform for information exchange (Wongsurawat, 2019, p. 52).

This study of old Chinese newspapers in Siam aims to cast light on the printing materials and the Chinese communities in Siam from the late 1910s to the 1930s. It would argue that a wide range of reading spaces for the Chinese community in Siam helped foster their Chinese identity and political consciousness through columns such as news, commentary, literary work, and entertainment. This reading space was dynamic, changing in response to the political climate, prevailing social trends, and interactions between China and other nations at various junctures in modern history. This essay takes the period from the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912 to the 1930s as the major timeline and explores the main characteristics of the printing press and the reading culture of the Siamese Chinese community and explicates selected newspaper contents, based on the old Chinese newspapers published in Siam and preserved in the TDCN database of HCU. Specifically, it aims to reveal elements of Chinese newspapers and illustrate the characteristics of Chinese printing presses in the Siamese Chinese community during the late 1910s until the early 1930s.

Research Methodology

This article is a documentary research on the Chinese community in Siam with a historical approach, and its mode of presentation is an analytical description (see Stanford, 1998; Carr, 2018 [1961]). Its primary documents were the Chinese-language newspapers published in Siam during the early twentieth century, particularly the Siamese Chinese-language newspapers archived in the TDCN database at HCU. Generally, the principal consideration in using these documents as historical evidence is their quality in representing social meanings and historical facts, and these documents could be assessed and cross-

checked with criteria such as authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning (see Scott, 1991). As above-mentioned, it is evident that these Chinese-language newspapers have not yet received much academic attention. In short, this study attempts to point out that major events in modern Chinese history, social trends, and cultural traditions helped formulate the political discourse of Chinese-language newspapers published in Siam from the late 1910s to the early 1930s.

A Historical Background of the Chinese Community in the Early 20th Century Bangkok

A big wave of Chinese immigration to Siam/Thailand began in the latter part of the 19th century. In perspective, China's defeat in the Opium Wars during the mid-19th century resulted in a series of unequal treaties that significantly influenced migration. Triumphantly, the Western powers used their military superiority to exert dominance over the main Chinese ports, simultaneously establishing legal structures to facilitate the recruitment and transportation of Chinese cheap labor abroad. Due to several circumstances, including natural calamities, famines, population constraints, and uprisings, the Chinese were compelled to depart from their own country in search of better prospects (Yen, 1986, p.79).

Counting the exact number of Chinese people in Siam in the early 19th century is challenging. The memoirs of several Western visitors provided insight into the immense scale of the Chinese community. The estimated population of Siam was 3,000,000, according to Howard Malcolm's estimation in 1837. Among them were 800,000 Shans, 195,000 Malays, and 450,000 Chinese, leaving the total number of Siamese around 1,500,000. In Bangkok, the Chinese population and their descendants were 60,000, while the Siamese population was 300,000 (Malcolm, 1839, pp. 120–125). During his tour of Siam in the spring of 1840, Fred Arthur Neale observed that the Siamese population in Bangkok exceeded the Chinese population only by four to one. In particular, estimations placed the Siamese population at 240,000 and the Chinese population at 70,000 (Neale, 1852, p. 30). According to Victor Purcell, Leon Rosmy's population estimate in 1884 was more reasonable, suggesting that the whole population of Siam would reach 5.9 million. This figure encompassed 1.6 million Siamese, 1.5 million Chinese, 1 million Malays, and 1 million Laos. According to Purcell himself, the population of Bangkok consisted of 200,000 Chinese and 120,000 Siamese (Purcell, 1951, p.107).

In the early 20th century, based on his personal experience, John Gordon Drummond Campbell believed that the 400,000 Chinese who paid the poll tax in 1900 was an underestimate (This statistic of 400,000 was derived from the anticipated number of Chinese individuals who paid the poll tax in 1900). On the other hand, Alfred Raquez paid close attention to population matters and spoke with Chinese leaders while in Siam; therefore, his estimate of 600,000 was likely closer to the correct figure (Skinner, 1957: 69-70). Chinese immigrants who shared the same dialect group were more likely to develop group unity

based on their geographical features rather than their national attributes (Kuhn, 2008, p. 142). Skinner classified the Chinese people in Siam into five dialect groups, namely Teochew, Cantonese, Hokkien, Hakka, and Hainanese. While the demographic number of these dialect groups remains a subject of debate, it is certain that the Teochew people were the most numerous. In 1948, Gao Shiheng pointed out in his book *On Nanyang* that the people from Southern Hokkien were the second largest group, followed by the Hainanese, the Cantonese, and the Hakka. According to Skinner, Hakka was the second most populous Chinese dialect group, with Southern Hokkien having the highest number of individuals (Skinner, 1957, p.215).

The Chinese were willing to go anywhere they could make a name for themselves monetarily (Blanchard, 1957, p. 52). And they brought their specialties and techniques with them wherever they went (Bowring, 1857, p. 201). In the early nineteenth century, the Chinese introduced sugar cane and made sugar, which eventually became Siam's main export ever since (Malcolm, 1839, p. 128). Rubber plantations were also the primary intention of Chinese emigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with thousands arriving in these plantations in Southern Siam specifically. They often homestead jungle areas, clearing up and planting them. Along the road from Kuang Niang to Satul, several small estates were owned and maintained by Chinese migrants from Sitiawan and other Malayan cities. The Chinese have also moved along the railroad that runs from Hat Yia, changing the countryside into a rubber jungle. Chinese had risen up in new towns, founded schools, run stores and shops, and established medical facilities (Landon, 1941, p. 72).

Likewise, the Chinese also engaged in timbering and mining. And it is probable that Siamese tin exploration began before the fourteenth century (Skinner, 1957, p. 2). The majority of Chinese immigrants, however, have mostly engaged in business and trade. While Thai peasants cultivated the fields and Thai elites governed them, a wide range of Chinese have been involved in many sectors of commerce, trade, and industry, serving both sides. A contemporary British traveler, Samuel Hallett, provided a description of the many occupations and crafts in which the Chinese population was involved during the late nineteenth and early 20th centuries in Siam:

In Siam, Chinese can be seen everywhere. The Chinese make up almost half of the Meh Nam delta's population. They are neither serfs nor slaves, and they travel freely across the nation. Mr. Eaton, an accomplished and meticulous American Baptist missionary in Bangkok who engages with the Chinese community for the mission, refers to them as the Americans of the East. They serve as tax revenue collectors and, in collaboration with the king's favorite courtiers, hold nearly total authority over the country's commerce by engaging in a range of

occupations in Siam, including merchants, shoemakers, bricklayers, carpenters, tailors, gardeners, and fishermen. They are often regarded by Europeans as the most skilled servants in Siam (Hallett, 1890, p.460).

With the obvious decline of the Chinese empire and the rise of nationalism in Siam in the early 20th century, the position of the Chinese in Siam underwent a catastrophic change, leading to their designation as “the Jews of the East.” Vajiravudh (r. 1910-1925), the subsequent king, was the first proponent of Siamese nationalism. The new king felt obliged to inspire his subjects toward their collective fate via writings, using his understanding of the West to highlight both the deficiencies and possibilities inside Siam. In 1914, he published a booklet named “The Jews of the East” under the pseudonym “Asavabahu.” It became the dominant claim in the Thai legal dispute concerning the Chinese community in Siam.

Whereas being Thai was meant to be royal to the Thai King, being Chinese was economically oriented, socially engaged only among themselves, and politically royal to their motherland. Since then, Thai nationalism and anti-Sinicism have heated up (Vella, 1978, p. 202). However, the initial stage of Thai nationalism largely consisted of intellectual maneuvering. Except for those pertaining to Chinese education, a few official actions were really damaging to the Chinese people.

In 1918, Siam promulgated the Civil School Regulations and established restrictions on the principal's appointment, the staff's Siamese proficiency, the instructing hours of the Siamese language, and the teaching contents, aiming to inspire the loyalty of overseas Chinese to Siam and promote the assimilation of the Chinese into Siam. Between the 1920s and 1930s, there was a steady development of Siam's official policy towards the Chinese. These policies aimed to promote assimilation and diminish Chinese influence over Siam's economy. The assimilation strategy highlighted the reduction of Chinese educational institutions, the imposition of immigration restrictions, and a reluctance to engage in diplomatic interactions with the Chinese government. The first immigration law in 1927, the compulsory education regulations in 1932, and the subsequent revision of the immigration law in 1933 were examples of significant legislation (Wongsurawat, 2019, p.155). Consequently, the promulgation of the aforementioned laws had intensified the contention between Siamese elites and Siamese Chinese. In an effort to control the Chinese population from the ground up, the government of Siam doubled the Chinese immigration fee after the 1930s, shut down banks that dealt in Chinese foreign currency exchange, and expelled members of the triad, businessmen, and political activists who were involved in the boycott of Japanese goods. Besides, Siam authorities banned all Chinese newspapers except for two after 1938 (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2014, p.129).

The Chinese Newspapers in the Early Twentieth Century Siam

The incompetence of the Qing government during the late 1900s made it difficult for people from all socioeconomic classes to survive under the feudal lords. Numerous intellectuals of that era, including Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, along with those who had returned from abroad, such as Sun Yat-sen, assimilated Western cultural and political knowledge to the reflections of Qing dynasty's defeat in the First China-Japan War. They recognized the pressing necessity for reform, which in turn sparked a domestic reform movement. The royalist faction included Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, and other intellectuals who advocated for the preservation of Qing royal power while calling for its transformation into a constitutional monarchy. The reformists, under the leadership of Sun Yat-sen, cried for the removal of the Qing dynasty and the creation of a fresh national social structure, drawing inspiration from Japan's reform efforts and Western democratic principles. Kang, Liang, and Emperor Guangxu had thereby jointed force to lead the Reform Movement in 1898, known as Bairei Weixin, which was an initiative to safeguard the Qing court. However, the interference of the Empress Dowagers led to the failure of the reform (Chang, 1980, p. 328).

Apparently, the reform led to a significant split within the court, resulting in an unresolvable conflict between the empress Dowager and the whole officialdom, as well as the emperor and a small group of radical young reformers (Jansen, 2008, p. 348). Kang and Liang, who represented the royalist faction, together with Sun Yat-sen, who represented the reform movement, dedicated to travel overseas to garner support among the Chinese diaspora. In his study of the Chinese newspaper in Siam, Xie Yourong pointed out that the emergence of Chinese newspapers in Thailand may be attributed directly to the internal political disputes that occurred in the late Qing dynasty, which later extended to other regions. After the 1898 Reform Movement, the Qing dynasty has successfully dominated both factions, irrespective of whether it was a constitutional monarchy or a democratic revolution. As a consequence, people from both sides were expelled and forced to seek help from other sources, making overseas Chinese the main focus of their conflict. The establishment of propaganda institutions, such as newspapers, was fundamental and promising to realize their political ideals. The founding of *Hanjing Ribao* in 1905 was a direct consequence of this (Xie, 1992, pp. 7-8).

As the royalist newspaper *Hanjing Ribao* received widespread acclaim as the first Chinese-language newspaper in Siam/Thailand. Nevertheless, *Meinan Ribao* saw a short cessation due to financial problems and later changed its name to *Meinan Gongbao*. Internal divisions emerged shortly thereafter due to different political stances. The faction that supported the monarchy initially changed the name to *Meinan Gongbao* and finally converted its title to *Zhonghua Minbao* due to the change of editor-in-chief. It was in existence for three decades, spanning from 1911 to 1939. Meanwhile, *Huaxian Xinbao* was established by the

revolutionists led by Xiao Focheng that broke away from the *Meinan Ribao* and lent their support to the Republican cause. Thereafter, *Huaxian Xinbao* and *Zhonghua Minbao* had engaged in a prolonged conflict over their differing political stance (Xie, 1992, p. 32–35).

However, based on a study done on HCU, it has been shown that as early as 1903, there was a Chinese newspaper named *Hanjing Ribao*. For various reasons, it is no longer in existence. There were only *Meinan Ribao*, *Meinan Gongbao*, and *Qi'nan Ribao* being recognized by their names (HCU, 2018). Another oldest extant newspaper in the library, *Tianhan Gongbao*, was established in 1917. According to HCU investigation, numerous Chinese newspapers that existed from the 1910s to the 1930s were not able to withstand natural degradation over time due to the quality of the paper (HCU, 2018). Apparently, the newspapers suffered irreparable losses due to negligence, including factors such as repeated folds, tearing, and bug infestation. Currently, a collection of newspapers predating the 1950s includes *Tianhan Gongbao*, *Huaxian Xinbao*, *Zhonghua Minbao*, *Huaqiao Ribao*, *Chenzhong Ribao*, *Gongshan Ribao*, *Minguo Ribao*, *Xianjing Huaqiao Ribao*, *Minzhong Ribao*, and *Zhongyuan Bao*. This study primarily focuses on analyzing the contents of the newspapers listed above.

Reading Culture of the Chinese Community, 1910s-1930s

The content of Chinese newspapers and periodicals in the 30 years from the late 1910s to the 1930s was extensive. However, categorizing the material under the three categories of politics, culture, and education allows us to identify their distinct features and shared elements. This provides empirical support for understanding the Chinese community's reading culture, community profile, and mainstream trends during that period. First and foremost, Siam's Chinese's printing press at the beginning of the 20th century was supportive of the Chinese revolutionary, as reflected in political news and commentaries. With the increasing nationalism in China, Chinese newspaper elites made significant efforts to boost Chinese identity recognition, create a positive and active political atmosphere, and embark on a path to explore the realization of national freedom and prosperity. Focusing on the country's weaknesses and the external humiliations it endured, political news and commentaries primarily comprised three major modules: an analysis of the Chinese situation, an introduction and understanding of mainstream Chinese political trends, and the patriotic calls and initiatives of the Chinese community.

The first module, which analyzed the Chinese situation, highlighted the concerns of the Chinese community in Siam. On 15 June 1926, *Zhonghua Minbao* published an editorial entitled "Fair Comments on China by Professor Abe Isoo of Waseda University," denouncing the great powers' encroachment on China." In the 1920s, the War of Resistance Against Japan had not fully erupted, but the overseas Chinese in Siam had already sensitively sensed the smell of war. Japan's expansion into Korea and Manchuria resulted in the utter

destruction of China's military force and naval superiority. Japan's military objectives, specifically aimed at capturing Peking from the outset, made the Sino-Japanese War of 1894 a calamity for the Chinese (Liu, 1980, p. 269). On 3 July 1926, *Zhonghua Minbao's* editorial "The Dreadful Conspiracy of Japan" pointed out directly, "Japan has been bullying China since the First Sino-Japanese War, and now it is planning to colonize North Manchuria, intending to annex Manchuria and Mongolia, becoming a great power in the Far East. Once Japan achieves its ambition, the people will find themselves as slaves in a country they no longer control. Therefore, we should unite our national strength to resist."

The problem of warlordism was another significant concern for the Chinese people. The period from 1916 to 1928 was often referred to as the era characterized by the dominance of warlords (Sheridan, 1980, p. 284). The prevalence of warlord governance inflicted profound calamities upon the Chinese populace (Sheridan, 1980, p. 317). In the 1920s, there was a surge of critical articles in Chinese newspapers and magazines addressing the phenomenon. The *Huaxian Xinbao* published "Memories of the Central Plains," a lamentation about warlords tearing apart the country, on 10 May 1922. There were calls for the people to unite in support of the Northern Expedition, such as "The Opportunity is Coming," published in the *Huaxian Xinbao* on 13 May 1922. On 26 July 1917, the *Tianhan Gongbao* published "The Restoration of Monarchy is a Farce," scathingly mocking the warlords' attempts to restore the monarchy. An article published in *Huaxian Xinbao* on 22 May 1922, "Wars between the Zhili Clique and Fengtian Clique Profoundly Affected Shanghai, with the subtitle "The Zhili Clique Nearly Depleted People's Wealth," indicated that businesses, particularly the financial sector, have disastrously suffered due to the two cliques' war. At the same time, the cost of rice and cloth skyrocketed, and the warlords hoarded people's rice for the war, leading to a miserable life for many.

Minguo Ribao published the "Political Report of Zhou Enlai on the Diplomatic Support Association" on 5 January 1926, which was a reprint of Zhou Enlai's political report. However, the newspaper reprinted it in full and occupied a whole page that day. The report first equated the nature of the Diplomatic Support Association and the Committee of Canton-Hong Kong Workers Strike, both of which were institutions that "aim to unite workers, farmers, businessmen, students, and soldiers to resist imperialism." Next, the report called on all sectors of society to form a united front to revolutionize. Finally, the report specifically mentioned the implementation of revolutionary strategies to defeat each imperialist force individually. The report, filled with new concepts and strategies for revolution, provided readers with a broad perspective on revolutionary issues. The report indicated that the old Chinese newspapers in Siam have proactively disseminated revolutionary ideas to the Chinese community at this stage.

The second module of the Chinese newspaper's political section focuses on analyzing and comprehending the prevailing political trends in China. The debate encompasses Sun Yat-sen's "Three Principles of the People," a concept that significantly shapes China's current state of affairs. In the understanding of the Chinese people, the "Three Principles of the People" have emerged as a potent instrument for overthrowing foreign powers and eliminating warlords. In the editorial titled "The Three Principles of the People and Imperialism," published by *Zhonghua Minbao* on 1 July 1926, the author begins by citing a renowned quotation from Zhuangzi's work "Chu Shi Biao": "We and thieves of Han cannot coexist. Han should not be content to retain sovereignty over a part of the country." The author continued that "The Three Principles of the People and imperialism are mutually incompatible, with imperialism being characterized by aggression and selfishness. 'The Three Principles of People' are both revolutionary and humanitarian. Today, China cannot dismantle imperialism unless it adheres to the Three Principles of the People." Also, *Zhonghua Minbao* published "Sun Yat-sen's Thoughts and China's Future," a highly acclaimed commentary on Sun Yat-sen and his "Three Principles of the People," on 9 June 1926. The author claimed that Sun Yat-sen has a "great personality," and his early death has raised the author's concerns about China.

Early in the 20th century, the Chinese readership that could access these newspapers in Siam had experienced a surge in mainstream political thought, represented by the "Three Principles of the People," which sparked strong resonance within the community and shaped its revolutionary spirit. This was evidently reflected in the third module of Chinese-language newspapers in political field, which included patriotic calls and Chinese initiatives. Examples of class struggle advocacy included the article "The True Meaning of Class Struggle," published in *Zhonghua Minbao* on 31 July 1926. Also, the article "Perseverance, Victory," published in *Zhonghua Minbao* on 26 January 1926, advocated for a firm belief in the struggle to thoroughly defeat Japanese imperialism. In addition, the serialized article "The Hedonism of Youth," which appeared in the *Huaxian Xinbao* on 23 June 1922, sought to inspire young people who indulged in material enjoyment to embrace the "youthful spirit" of "speaking boldly, advocating boldly, and writing boldly." "Sacrifice and Struggle," published in *Zhonghua Minbao* on 28 January 1926, urged the people to fear no sacrifice in the process of struggle. In a commentary titled "An Announcement to Compatriots at Home and Abroad," published in *Zhonghua Minbao* on 11 June, 1926, it solemnly stated that "whether for the future of the country or for personal destiny, the Northern Expedition aimed at overthrowing warlords is something we should support."

Secondly, the Chinese-language newspapers reflected that the reading scope of the Chinese in Siam in the early 20th century was also a multicultural composite of tradition and modernity. In terms of culture, the content of the newspapers demonstrates that the Chinese

are not rigidly adhering to a specific cultural model; rather, they are embracing both traditional Chinese thought and adapting to changing trends and changes in their living environment, allowing for timely changes. On 23 July 1926, the small news story “Filial Daughter-in-law Saves Father-in-law by Cutting Her Own Meat” appeared in *Zhonghua Minbao*, about an elderly man in Wuxi who was seriously ill. His daughter-in-law, following the ancient Chinese story of “Cutting Thighs to Cure Father,” performed the same action. When the family and neighbors learned about it, they were deeply moved and praised the act of “filial piety.” Tianhan Gongbao published a commentary named “Wuli” [Military Force] on 11 September 1917. The paper posited that both the government and the populace frequently use coercive measures to address and resolve issues. We refer to a nation that uses coercion to repress its people as a Baoguo [tyrannical nation]. A baomin [mob] refers to a person who uses force against the authorities. Irrespective of the intentions of both sides, resorting to coercive measures to resolve issues would result in significant calamities for the nation and its people. The editorial’s main concept, opposing the use of force, aligned with the notion of ren [benevolence], the most important virtue in the four main concepts (Ren, benevolence; Li, ceremonial propriety; Yi, proper behavior; Zhi, practical knowledge) of Confucianism (Havens, 2013, p. 33).

On 21 January 1926, *Zhonghua Minbao* published another article entitled “Chastity,” which not only subverted the traditional Chinese view of women’s chastity but also challenged men’s authorities. The article proposed that “the notion of women’s chastity was a product of barbaric times, while many men are uncertain about their own political beliefs.” Clearly, the Siamese Chinese community was not a cultural conservative who strictly abided by traditional Chinese culture. During this period, the Chinese community in Siam began to consider various women’s issues, questioning the traditional “three obedience” and “four virtues” used to judge women since ancient China. *Zhonghua Minbao* published editorials titled “Developing Women’s Advantages” on 1 January 1926, concluding that enhancing women’s education can tackle the long-standing issue of gender inequality, thereby establishing connections between women’s issues and education issues.

Another editorial, “Women’s Liberation,” which appeared on 9 January 1926 mentioned that “Women’s liberation is the trend of this era, and our long-repressed women should awaken as soon as possible. Our educational policy should also reflect the spirit of feminism and, finally, help women establish an independent personality.” The commentary not only addressed women’s education, but also explicitly mentioned the concept of “feminism.” Still another serialized commentary, “How to Improve the Life of Working Women” published in January 1926, not only discussed the issue of working women but also reflected on the issue of women’s education. Even if society improves the current state of women’s education, it would still pose challenges for working women, oppressed by

capitalists and constrained by their families, to sustain their livelihoods. How can they have the energy and conditions to receive an education?

Contentingly, newspapers' content demonstrated a comprehensive Chinese cultural community. The Chinese readership was widely involved in film, opera, book, and newspaper culture. The majority of old Chinese newspapers in Siam have specialized columns for film promotion, and Siam's Chinese film industry is growing. Nanxing Dianxiyuan [Nanxing Cinema] and Zhongguo Dianxiyuan [Zhongguo Cinema], both influential film companies in Siam during the 1930s, often used half a page or even an entire page promote their films. These films featured a wide range of themes, such as martial arts, romance, war, and family ethics. The cultural practices of the Chinese community in Siam were not exclusive to any particular group. The Chinese cinema industry proactively imports international films into its repertoire. On 7 July 1934, *Minguo Ribao* included a half-page advertisement promoting the Huanghou Daxiyuan [Huanghou Grand Theater] and the Zhennan Dianxiyuan [Zhennan Cinema], promoting the English-language film *Anna Christie* (Brown, 1930) by Swedish actress Greta Garbo. The Siamese Chinese film industry's impact on the Chinese community was also evident in the widespread appeal of films. On November 14, 1933, *Chenzhong Ribao* released an advertisement promoting the film *Ku Tze Kin Sing* [Cuckoo in an Old Temple] (Li & Liang, 1932), a work expounding the Buddhist doctrine. The advertisement showed that the film company had up to six theater branches.

The Chinese community's entertainment in Siam included not only films but also music, dances, and operas. In the 1930s, the Meihua Song and Dance Troupe was one of the most popular song and dance troupes in the Siamese Chinese community. *Chenzhong Ribao* published a performance advertisement for the Meihua Song and Dance Troupe on 20 March 1933. The advertising showcases the troupe's performance, which included a prelude, a group dance named "Marching Military Music," a pas de deux named "To Bill and Co," a group dance named "Jinjing Wutong," a song and dance named "Flower Selling Girl," a song named "Modern Miss," and a historical costume song and dance called "Imperial Consort Yang." The program amalgamates classical and modern elements, exemplifying the multifaceted culture of the Chinese community in Siam.

Chenzhong Ribao's 14 March 1933 article, "The Long-Awaited Meihua Song and Dance Troupe Arrived in Siam by Boat Yesterday, with Members Dressed in Gorgeous Clothes and in High Spirits," also reflected the Meihua Singing and Dancing Troupe's popularity in Siam. The article mentioned, "The long-promoted Meihua Troupe arrived in Siam safely by boat yesterday. The members wore beautiful cheongsams, white skirts, and student makeup. After arriving, the troupe took eleven cars, arranged by the China Film Company, to tour the city and have sightseeing. At the welcome dinner that night, some local art societies and overseas Chinese in Bangkok participated and welcomed the arrival of the

troupe.” The Meihua Singing and Dancing Troupe was one of the 1930s troupes that appeared in the Chinese community, but it was not the only one. According to *Minguo Ribao*, the Chinese community witnessed the arrival of another singing and dancing band, known as the Zha Ruilong Singing and Dancing Troupe, in July 1934. Compared with the Meihua Troupe, the team had a greater number of members, totaling 30, and offered more performances.

The old Chinese newspaper in Siam also showed the significance of Teochew opera and other classic Chinese operas within the Chinese community’s cultural fabric, alongside cinema, singing, and dance. Donghu Xiyuan [the East Lake Theater] was the primary venue for opera performances among the Chinese community in Siam during the 1930s. *Chenzhong Ribao* published an advertisement for the Teochew opera performance Arbiter Justice Bao (episode 15) on 1 March 1933. On 9 April 1934, *Minguo Ribao* published an advertisement to promote the opera performance Zhu Yuanzhang, Emperor Taizu of Ming (episode 13). In this cultural milieu, both opera performances followed the scripted episodes within the Chinese community, exemplifying opera’s widespread popularity as a form of entertainment.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the Chinese community was also home to a variety of book and newspaper agencies. Qiaomin Book and Newspaper Agencies sold a wide range of domestic publications. On 15 April 1934, it advertised six periodicals on *Minguo Ribao*, including categories of literature, criticism, culture, and art. Other known book and newspaper agencies include Gonghe Book and Newspaper Agency, Zhonghua Gaizao Book and Newspaper Agency, Huaqiao Book and Newspaper Agency, etc. The editorial “The Number of Book and Newspaper Agencies Is Increasing” in *Zhonghua Minbao* on 21 March 1935 explained why book and newspaper agencies have proliferated. The commentary pointed out that book and newspaper agencies served as a platform for promoting new cultural movement, a campaign spearheaded by intellectuals that promoted democracy and science during the May Fourth Movement of 1919 (Furth, 1980, p. 332).

Another characteristic of Siam’s Chinese reading culture was that it attached enormous importance to education and science. The discussion of education-related issues in newspapers was unprecedented. Taking *Zhonghua Minbao* as an example, its education column was filled with a scholarly atmosphere between the lines. On 2 January 1926, it published a serialized commentary titled “Mathematics and Thinking Training.” The article first emphasized the importance of mathematics by establishing connections between mathematics and other disciplines and then discussed how to improve thinking abilities. There were also serialized works published in *Zhonghua Minbao* such as “Daltonian Education and Chinese Education (published on 4 February 1926),” which compared the differences between the Chinese and western education models. “The Past and Present of

Music Education (published on 10 February 1926),” advocating for the improvement of Chinese artistic literacy; “My Opinion on Overseas Chinese Education in Southeast Asia (published on 15 March 1926),” giving suggestions for the development of overseas Chinese education in Southeast Asia. “On Philosophy (published on 10 February 1926),” exploring the origin of philosophical issues; and “Fine Arts and Education (2 March 1926),” calling for attaching equal importance to both fine arts education and cultural education. There were countless commentaries of this kind. These editorials presented numerous novel insights that could potentially inform contemporary educational research.

Finally, the Chinese reading culture in Siam had significant regional characteristics, demonstrating a strong affection for the homeland. In terms of regional news reports, most Chinese newspapers focused on Canton, Fujian, and Hainan, the three major provinces with a significant population flow to Siam. Examples included *Chenzhong Ribao*’s “Canton News” and “News of Various Regions”, *Tianhan Gongbao*’s “Chaomei” [Teochew and Meizhou], *Zhonghua Minbao*’s “Canton” and “Chaomei”, *Huaqiao Ribao*’s “Canton News”, “Hainan News”, and “Chaomei News”, and *Zhongnan Chenbao*’s “Minnan News” [Southern Fujian News], “Chaomei News”, and “Canton News”. *Xianjing Huaqiao Jingbao*’s “Chaomeiqiong” [Teochew, Meizhou, and Hainan].

Although the names of regional news columns provided by different newspapers were not the same, the focus on designated regions was consistent. News reports, based solely on the content of the *Tianhan Gongbao* on 8 July 1917, reflected many problems that existed in Teochew areas. The Chaomei column published articles such as “Rampant Opium in Dapu County,” “Frequent Arson Cases in Chao’an County,” “Corrupt Police Officer Accepts Bribes and Releases Wanted Criminals,” as well as “Urgent Need to Expel Prostitutes” and “Is There No Sin When One Has Money?” published on 26 July 1917, highlighting the concerns of the Chinese community in Siam about the situation in their homeland.

On 12 August 1917, *Tianhan Gongbao* published “The Difficulty of Traveling in the Xijiang River,” a refined work that showcased the overseas Chinese community’s affection for their homeland. It mainly told about the Xijiang River, the longest river in South China, which had many tributaries. Often, one person would hold a pole in front, while everyone else would paddle on the side of the boat to ensure smooth sailing. When sailing, we feel delighted when encountering downstream situations, while we tend to become frustrated when encountering an upstream situation. The article concluded that life, like a country, inevitably experiences setbacks and low tides. We should be brave enough to overcome adversity and move forward. From the title of the article, the name “The Difficulty of Traveling in the Xijiang River” Obviously drew inspiration from “Shu Dao Nan” [The Difficulty of Traveling on the Shu Road] (Shu, the abbreviation of Sichuan Province today), Li Bai’s masterpiece. “The Difficulty of Traveling on the Shu Road” artistically reproduced the magnificent and thrilling Shu Road,

showcasing the grandeur of the mountains and rivers of China. The name “The Difficulty of Traveling in the Xijiang River” can easily evoke emotional resonance and cultural empathy among Siamese Chinese readers.

Conclusion

The Reading of Chinese newspaper is a cultural exchange activity that played a significant role in shaping Chinese identity during their time in exile. Shame was once used by the Siamese government as a tool to control the Chinese. Since the reign of King Vajirawudh, the king mainly based on shame to establish a standardized emotional order to curb the behavior of the Chinese (Eaksittipong, 2020, p. 402). A series of events made the King of Siam realize the importance of controlling the influence of Chinese nationalism and restricting the behavior of Chinese people on its territory. However, since the Chinese could choose to register as foreigners and enjoy extraterritorial jurisdiction, the king could not rely on substantive legal and political institutions to control Chinese people, leading to the important role of emotion as a national machine (Wongsurawat, 2019, p. 67). King Rama V tried to bring shame and guilt to the Chinese people, making them suffer. Labeled “the Jews of the East,” the Chinese community in Siam experienced an unprecedented identity crisis due to the emotional pain they endured.

The Siam Chinese Newspaper is not only the linkage between the Chinese and the motherland mentioned by Wongsurawat but also an important medium for the Chinese to cultivate national consciousness and carry forward the revolutionary spirit. In addition to the incidents identified by Murashima, such as Sun Yat-sen’s visit to Siam in 1903, the establishment of Tianhua Hospital in 1905, the Chinese boycott of American goods in mid-1905, and the founding of the Siamese branch of the Chinese United League in 1908, it must also acknowledge the significant contribution of Chinese newspapers in the early 20th century to the growth of Siamese-Chinese nationalism (Murashima, 2013, p. 170). The research on the Chinese Language Newspaper reveals that the study of Chinese identity, from the early Skinner to the later Eaksittipong, has not satisfactorily touched the Chinese spiritual world. Moreover, it has not been sufficient to fully support their arguments on Chinese Siamese assimilation, thereby neglecting important index and evidences to explicate Siamese Chinese and their cultural community.

The pressure from Siamese authority, the weakness of the motherland, and the status of exile made the Chinese elites used Chinese-language newspapers as a weapon to combat the shame Siamese authorities imposed on the Chinese community. The elite of Chinese-language newspapers promptly disseminated information about China’s situation and mainstream political thoughts to the Chinese community in Siam. In the hope of empathizing the entire Chinese community in their Chinese identity recognition, they offered advice and suggestions for the country to get rid of poverty and oppression, thereby

demonstrating their patriotic feelings. In fact, the Chinese community in Siam perceives assimilation as a relatively complex issue. The Chinese community itself has contradictions between accepting assimilation and rejecting it. Firstly, it is necessary to divide the Chinese community into two categories: Chinese elites and ordinary Chinese. The Chinese elites, with their increasingly mature political awareness, higher cultural level, and better economic status, always adhered to their Chinese identity and struggle against the assimilation policies with the Siamese elites in an invisible way. Through policies and intermarriage, the ordinary Chinese were easier to be assimilated.

By examining the specific content reflected in newspapers and periodicals, we can find the following characteristics of the reading culture of Chinese in Siam. Firstly, the old Chinese newspapers in Siam diligently followed their motherland's political situation and maintained a notable degree of political acumen. Their emphasis on events occurring in China and around the world fostered the development of self-awareness among the Chinese population. Secondly, newspapers from the early twentieth century documented the emergence of a distinct Siamese Chinese cultural society, heavily influenced by mainstream Chinese ideas. Is community provided a diverse range of books and newspaper societies, as well as cinemas and theaters? Finally, the establishment of cultural groups played a pivotal role in strengthening their awareness and sense of Chinese identity. Chinese people, especially while living abroad, should prioritize maintaining a strong connection with their homeland and closely monitoring the fate of their country. Additionally, they should strive to cultivate deep spiritual lives. The reading culture of Chinese in Siam from the 1910s to the 1920s may be described as a distinctive Southeast Asian Chinese culture that was characterized by its revolutionary nature, the clash between tradition and modernity, and a deep connection to their country.

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