

The Influence of China's Literary Movements on Malaysia's Vernacular Chinese Literature in the 1930's

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I

A very large portion of Malaysian literature is written in Malay, the most widely used language in Malaysia and, at the same time, the national language of the country. This portion of works in Malay, or Malay literature as it is normally called, is the national literature of Malaysia and it represents the most dominant and vigorous force in the literary field of the country today. However, due to the plurality of the Malaysian society and to the former colonial education system, separating the students into schools of different streams, namely, Malay, Chinese, Tamil, and English, a portion of Malaysian literature is not written in Malay, but in various vernaculars. Among these vernacular works, a considerable volume is in Chinese. This is what is normally referred to as Malaysian-Chinese literature.

Malaysian-Chinese literature began to appear on the scene only at the beginning of the 1920's. And within a period of less than a quarter century, before the Japanese occupied Malaya at the end of 1941, it produced a sizable body of writings. This seems to be an admirable accomplishment, particularly when we take into consideration the conditions of the early immigrant society and the belated and backward expansion of Chinese education in Malaya. The involvement of foreign literary influence is certainly one of the main causes for this development. When we examine foreign influence in Malaysian-Chinese writings, we would naturally look into influence from China. The frequent close contact between the Chinese immigrants in Malaya and China in those days is one obvious reason. Another is the convenience in communication: both Malaysian-Chinese literature and

Chinese literature use vernacular Chinese as their medium. Owing to the language barrier, it would not have been possible for any other literary influence to squeeze into the community of Malaysian-Chinese writers during the period.

In this paper, I intend to examine the impact of China's literary influence on Malayan-Chinese literature in the 1930's. I will begin with a brief account of the early social conditions of the Chinese immigrants in the growth of literary interest. I will then place under focus the literary influence from China on Malaysian-Chinese writings, particularly the writings of the Malayan-Chinese critics concerning ideas and trends in literature. Attempts will be made to illustrate that the Malayan-Chinese writings of the period followed closely the literary developments in China. I will also look into the various media through which the Chinese influence was channelled into Malaya.

II

Early Chinese settlements in Malaya were said to have begun several centuries ago, but it was in the nineteenth century, due to the expansion of European investment in Southeast Asia, that the real flood of Chinese immigration began to pour into this country. The social conditions of these immigrants at this time were hopeless for the growth of interest in literary matters. The immigrants were constantly faced with the problems of survival. Being an almost entirely male population,¹ they usually spent whatever leisure time and money they had in all kinds of vices.² There was no trace of a common interest which would bind them together as an ethnic group. And worst of all, almost all of them were illiterate.

Changes began to take place only at the end of the nineteenth century. With the arrivals of a new generation of immigrants, who had a better degree of literacy, and with the expansion of Chinese education in Malaya, the rate of illiteracy began to fall. In the last two decades of the century, with the support of the Ch'ing government, which was desperate to win over the overseas Chinese, a number of schools were set up. Later, when Southeast Asia was flooded with political refugees from China, this expansion of Chinese education in Malaya was further accelerated. While making efforts to rally support from the overseas Chinese, many of these refugees, for example,

K'ang Yu-wei (康有爲) and Dr. Sun Yat-sen (孫逸仙), had played a significant role in advocating Chinese education in Southeast Asia. Consequently, the number of Chinese schools in Malaya increased rapidly. At the beginning of the twentieth century, there were no fewer than three hundred Chinese schools in the country.³

While illiteracy was being reduced, other qualitative changes in the immigrant society were under way. After the first half of the nineteenth century, female immigration began to flow in steadily.⁴ This reduction of the disproportion of the sexes had to an extent contributed to the stabilization of the Chinese society in Malaya. In the meantime, the Chinese society was becoming more distinctly Chinese in character. Partly due to local Chinese newspapers, which often advocated solidarity, and partly due to the various literary societies and book clubs, which provided a common platform where the immigrants could come together and understand one another better, a sense of harmony and unity among the various dialect-speaking groups was felt.⁵ Together with this new found solidarity came the rise of the middle classes and even the entrepreneurs. In the later part of the nineteenth century, some of the Malayan-Chinese had become very active in economic affairs. By the end of the century, a large number of them had become the *nouveaux riches*.⁶ These people had not only the means but also the time to indulge in some form of literary undertaking.

However, two of the factors that were more directly responsible for initiating the literary life of the Chinese in Malaya were the publication of Chinese newspapers and the setting up of various literary societies and book clubs. Probably impressed by the English papers of the Europeans in Singapore, the Chinese on the island brought forth their first daily, the *Lat Pau* (叻報, Li-pao [Selat News]) in 1881.⁷ After this, particularly at the turn of the century, the number of local Chinese newspapers rose rapidly.⁸ Many of these papers were published by political leaders from China for political motives. These papers, besides contributing to the reduction of illiteracy and to the dissemination of knowledge and new ideas, had instilled a great deal of literary interest in their readers. A number of editors had introduced to their papers a new feature called the "fu-chang" (附張, supplement), some of which were literarily oriented. The supplement of *The Eastern Times* (時報, Shih-pao), which became a regular adjunct in 1904, carried verses, short stories, translations of European literary works and other literary articles. The *Lat Pau Supplement*, introduced in 1906, often featured poems and was

noted for its Cantonese ballades called the "yüeh-ou" (粵謳). It should also be noted that a number of these newspapers often sponsored literary competitions. *T'u-nan jih-pao* (圖南日報), for example, held a number of such competitions from 1904 to 1905.

Almost simultaneous with the publication of newspapers was the emergence of various literary societies and book clubs. The noted ones at the end of the nineteenth century include The Singapore Chinese Philomatic Society (好學會, Hao-hsüeh hui) and The Tao Nan Literary Society of Singapore (道南文社, Tao Nan Wen She). After the turn of the century, as Dr. Sun's revolutionaries stepped up their propaganda, many more such organizations, all of which were a cloak for revolutionary propaganda, began to fill the scene.⁹ Their activities in the literary domain — such as literary competitions, public lectures, debates, forums, and concerts — and the abundant reading materials they had provided brought about far-reaching effects on the literary development of the Chinese in Malaya. During the second decade of the twentieth century, the literary activities of the Chinese in Malaya were further invigorated. It was mainly inspired by China's Literary Revolution. The Chinese in Malaya noted with enthusiasm China's attempts to replace the *wen-yen* (文言, classical Chinese language) with the vernacular *pai-hua* (白話) and its urge to create a new literature written in the vernacular and to construct a new culture based on that of the West. When the vernacular became the chief language of instruction in schools, colleges, and universities in China in 1922, the Chinese in Malaya quickly adopted the vernacular as the medium of instruction in all public schools in the Peninsula. Literary works written in the vernacular began to appear and they were given considerable space in many local newspapers. *Hsin kuo-min jih-pao* (新國民日報), for example, published in October, 1919 a number of vernacular pieces amidst its predominantly *wen-yen* pages. These works are believed to be among the earliest Malayan-Chinese vernacular writings.

III

The influence of Chinese literary developments on Malayan-Chinese writings is traceable throughout the entire pre-war period. And the 1930's is the decade that most evidently reflects this foreign influence. The local

Chinese literary scene this time was virtually a pale reflection of the literary developments in China. Whatever issues the writers on the mainland stirred up invariably reverberated in Malaya without distortion. The idea of formulating a *ta-chung-yü* (大眾語, language of the masses) campaign and the advocacy of a *k'ang-chan wen-hsüeh* (抗戰文學, war-of-resistance literature) for the sake of arousing Chinese patriotic sentiments in the war against Japan, were both given a sympathetic hearing in Malaya.

The *ta-chung-yü* issue was originally brought up in China amidst the campaign to create a literature for the masses (大眾文藝, *ta-chung wen-i*). In order to produce a literature that "could be enjoyed by the masses . . . and created by the masses," the young Chinese critics in Shanghai recognized that they must first formulate a *lingua franca* that could be "easily spoken, understood [when spoken], written, and comprehended [in written form] by the masses." In order to realize this goal, Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai (瞿秋白) advocated as early as 1932 the development of the common language of the masses which he called the *p'u-t'ung-hua* (普通話). Another critic, Mao Tun (茅盾), being dubious about the existence of such a language, proposed instead to develop the *pai-hua*.¹⁰ Then, in 1934, thanks to the attempts of Wang Mao-tsu (汪懋祖) and Hsü Meng-yin (許夔因) to revive the classical language, the question of *ta-chung-yü* was discussed with more urgency. Meanwhile, the questions of whether or not *pai-hua* should be discarded, and to what extent dialects and local expressions (方言土語, *fang-yen t'u-yü*) should be assimilated, and in what form this *ta-chung-yü* should be written — in the original Chinese characters, in Romanized Chinese, or in Latinized script — received well-publicized attention.

This language issue immediately received the attention of the Chinese writers in Malaya. Beginning from 1934, many newspaper supplements published numerous articles focusing on the question of the language of the masses. Their views on this matter and their manner of argument coincided with those of their counterparts in China. The idea of formulating a Latinized *ta-chung-yü* based on the *P'u-t'ung-hua* was imported *in toto* into Malaya.

In discussing how the *ta-chung-yü* could be formed by the adoption of dialect and slang terms together with some commonly used vocabulary, one of the Malayan-Chinese critics, Hai Feng (海風), proposed "to accept the most commonly used vocabulary of the working dialects as the basis of *ta-chung-yü*," and "to absorb as much as possible the vocabulary that does

not belong to any privileged class but adequately expresses the correct consciousness of the masses." In other words, as another critic, Chan Hsi (瞻晞) put it, "enrich the vocabulary of the *ta-chung-yü* by incorporating various dialects and argots; unify the living languages of several million people and turn it into a new language."¹¹ This was exactly the view Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai had expressed in China earlier. Anxious to create a language that reflected contemporary speech and that could be understood when read aloud, he advocated the employment of the most frequently used vocabulary of the *p'u-t'ung-hua*, which, according to him, was already coming into existence.¹²

The Chinese writers in Malaya who supported the *p'u-t'ung-hua* were unwilling to accept either *wen-yen* or *pai-hua* as the basic of the new "common language." Criticizing it as the monopolized tool of a certain privileged class, they pointed out that *wen-yen* is very difficult to understand; "even those who have studied it several years might not necessarily understand it completely." As regards *pai-hua*, the shortcomings were that it was so Westernized it had become the new eight-legged language, removed from the masses. "Not only is it incapable of furthering the cause of the culture of the masses, but worse still, it is being used as an instrument for the demoralization of the masses."¹³ These points again were borrowed from the young Chinese intellectuals in Shanghai. Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai was one of those opposed to the kind of formal *wen-yen* as used in telegrams or the "modern" *wen-yen* as used by Liang Ch'i-ch'ao (梁啓超) in writing legal texts and public documents. Ch'ü was equally impatient with the *pai-hua* of his time, which he regarded as a failure because it "does not give any consideration to the speech habits of the Chinese language. Instead, it borrows liberally from the grammars of the ancient Chinese, European and Japanese languages. As a result, it has become the kind of *pai-hua* that simply cannot be read aloud and when read aloud cannot be understood." This according to him is a pseudo-*pai-hua* of modern *wen-yen* which cannot be spoken by living persons.¹⁴

In China, this propagation of *ta-chung-yü* was not without opposition. Seeing that the language of the masses was to develop at the expense of *pai-hua*, a number of writers quickly voiced their disagreement. Mao Tun, based on his own investigation, pointed out that the *p'u-t'ung-hua* which Ch'ü advocated did not exist. Ch'en I (陳奕) and Nieh Kan-nu (聶鉅弩) observed that there was not a single united common language among the Chinese masses. According to Ch'en I, "not only is there no one common

language that can be understood by people in the steamers, railway stations, and inns throughout the country, but even within a single city there is no such language."¹⁵ In defending the *pai-hua*, these writers in China argued that it was the working language of a great number of people, particularly the intellectuals, the students, and the residents of the cities. Thus, it could follow that if a literature of the masses was to be produced at the present stage, "we have, after all, no choice but to use the current *pai-hua*."¹⁶

The supporters of *pai-hua* in Malaya immediately echoed this sentiment. Repeating Mao Tun's view, Tu T'san (杜殘) stated that by investigating the actual situation in China, one would at once realize that there was not a common language that everybody understood. Rejecting the view that *pai-hua* was a privileged possession of a certain class, he claimed that it was a language that "can be written, can be understood [when spoken], and can be comprehended [in written form]." Forming a new language was therefore unnecessary since the *pai-hua* was in fact the common language of the Chinese people, if only because it was more commonly used than any other dialects.¹⁷

In the later part of this *ta-chung-yü* campaign, there were some writers in China who proposed to Latinize the Chinese script. For, as Lu Hsün (魯迅) pointed out, "to write this *ta-chung-yü*, which has more syllables than *wen-yen* and *pai-hua*, in traditional characters is wasting time, energy, ink, and paper."¹⁸ Other advocates of Latinization pointed out that the Latinized Chinese can do away with the four tones, and a consonant can represent a syllable. They were confident that "all you need to learn is 28 letters and some spelling and writing. Except for the lazy bones and the blockheads, anyone would be able to read and write it."¹⁹ Closely following the trend in China, the Chinese writers in Malaya immediately began to propagate the Latinization of Chinese writing. They praised the creation of "sin wenz" (新文字, *hsin wen-tzu*) as undoubtedly the necessary course of historical evolution, seeing it, as did their counterparts in China, as an inevitable substitute for the traditional Chinese script. They branded the "square characters" (方块字, conventional Chinese script) as "things that have grown mildewed," and "tools of the privileged class for oppressing the masses." Endorsing the opinions of the critics in China, they pointed out that "the masses, busy trying to make a living, cannot afford to receive an education through conventional Chinese characters, which requires at least four to five years." To their mind, therefore, "the idea of stamping out

illiteracy rates as high as eighty per cent by using conventional ideographs is a ridiculous fantasy.”²⁰

The striking similarity between the views of the writers in the two countries, as we have just noted, has already demonstrated the fact that the entire *ta-chung-yü* movement in Malaya was merely an imitation of the similar movement in China. There are still other evidences that can be cited to support this view. For example, many Malayan-Chinese writers quoted at length reports and articles from China to substantiate their points. A number of standard phrases used by the advocates in China were also repeatedly borrowed in Malaya. In quoting their counterparts in China, the Malayan-Chinese writers were quite honest about their sources, usually stating them either in parentheses immediately after the quotation or in a note appended to their articles. Frankly admitting the imitation in Malaya, one writer noted at the end of his article that what had been said so far in the Peninsula about the language issue was “words that have been spoken in the literary circle back home.”²¹ This perhaps accurately sums up the entire *ta-chung-yü* movement in Malaya.

IV

The promotion of *k'ang-chan wen-hsüeh* at the end of the 1930's in Malaya is another literary development that manifests the adhesion of Malayan-Chinese writings to China. In the face of increasing Japanese aggression, various war of resistance and national salvation movements in China were being intensified during the later part of the decade. While in the political arena, “Kuo-fang cheng-fu” (國防政府, national defense government) and “K'ang-Jih lien-chün” (抗日聯軍, anti-Japanese allied forces) were the watchwords; in the literary circle the slogan was “Kuo-fang wen-hsüeh” (國防文學, literature for national defense). Efforts were made to urge all writers to support the national front, regardless of their class, their ideology, and their clique, and to contribute for the sake of resisting the enemy and saving the country. But due to the disagreement on slogan — while the Association of Chinese Writers (中國文藝家協會, Chung-kuo wen-i chia hsieh-hui) called out “literature for national defense” the Association of Chinese Art and Literary Worker (中國文藝工作者協會, Chung-kuo wen-i kung-tso che hsieh-hui) cried for “national revolutionary struggle literature of

the masses (民族革命戰爭的大眾文學, *min-tsu ko-ming chan-cheng ti ta-chung wen-hsüeh*) – the unity of the Chinese writers was temporarily undermined. But this controversy soon subsided. On August 9, 1936, writers of different ideological persuasions were able to proclaim that “we the fellow-members of the literary world [of China], should not divide ourselves into cliques, but unite to fight the Japanese and to save our country.”²² Then with the formation of the Anti-Aggression Association of Pan-Chinese Writers and Artists (中華全國文藝界抗敵協會, *Chung-hua ch'üan-kuo wen-chieh k'ang-ti hsieh-hui*) in 1938, the united front of Chinese writers and artists finally became a reality. Members of this association were urged to use their pens, as soldiers would use their guns, to exhort the masses to defend the nation. In the meantime, a large number of literary journals began publication, branches of the association were set up in many provinces, and a network of literary correspondents (文藝通訊網, *wen-i t'ung-hsün wang*) was installed. Dominating the entire Chinese literary scene at this time was the theme of national salvation and the war of resistance. The works were so stereotyped that the heroes were invariably fighters on the battlefronts, whereas the villains were Chinese traitors and Japanese aggressors. Such traditional and popular media as *ke-yao* (歌謠), *hsiao-tiao* (小調), *ku-shu* (鼓書), *t'an-tz'u* (彈詞) and *chiu-chu* (舊劇) were fully employed because modern and Westernized works were considered to be too abstruse for the consumption of the masses.

As can be expected, the Chinese writers' concern with national salvation had made its impact on the writings of the Chinese in Malaya. At the end of the 1930's the entire Malayan-Chinese literary circle was engaged in arousing Chinese patriotism and anti-Japanese sentiment. Almost every literary work was centered on the anti-Japanese theme. The Chinese influence is most noticeable in the essays of the literary critics in Malaya. They neatly duplicated every point made by their counterparts on the mainland. In line with the basic concern of wartime literature, many Malayan-Chinese critics reminded the writers that they should not fix their focus on a single aspect. Rather, as Yeh Ni (葉尼) suggested, they should pay as much attention to depicting “the cruelty of the enemy, the resistance activities of the masses in the rear, and the various developments in the enemy country” as describing “the fighting scene on the battlefronts.” Ch'ing-lin Hsieh (青麟屑), opposing “narrowing the literature of wartime to war-shattered life,” pointed out that the content of wartime literature should be diversified

enough to cover not only "the hardship of the brave fighters on the front lines, but also the movements of the masses in the rear." Endorsing this view, another critic, Chin Ting (金丁), argued that the writers should focus not only on the positive aspects, but also on the negative aspects of the war of resistance. He wrote:

We should not only describe the brave combat of our soldiers and the sacrifice of their lives, but should also expose the shamelessness of the traitors against the social background that brought about them. We would write not only the violence of the Japanese soldiers, but also the anti-war and anti-aggression struggle carried out by some of the Japanese themselves. Not only are we to relate the vigour and the progress of the intellectuals in defending the nation, but also the panic and indecisiveness of some of them.²³

The impact of Chinese thought on the Malayan-Chinese scene should be evident from the above. Right from the beginning, critics in China, Chou Yang (周揚), for example, made it very plain that "the scope of *kuo-fang wen-hsüeh* should be made more comprehensive." Hu Lo (胡洛) pointed out that the limit of subjects for such literature is boundless. This point is made more specific by Yang Sao (楊騷), who observed that "*kuo-fang wen-hsüeh* should be broad enough to include both positive and negative descriptions either directly or indirectly."²⁴

In fostering the unity of the writers, the Malayan-Chinese critics again followed exactly what the advocates had said earlier in China. They stated that "*k'ang-chan wen-hsüeh* includes literature of all parties and of all classes," and that "it permits the literary freedom and activities of all parties and of all classes."²⁵ This was what the literary circle in China had been told earlier. In their attempts to form a unified front among the writers, the Chinese critics called upon the literary workers "not to divide themselves on the basis of clique and class." They urged that all writers should work hand in hand "no matter what one's background is, what clique one has associated with, and what peculiar literary views one has subscribed to in the past."²⁶

Another interesting aspect showing the impact of Chinese influence in Malaya this time was the establishment of a literary correspondence network in the Peninsula. In China, the Canton branch of the Anti-Aggression

Association of Pan-Chinese Writers and Artists first initiated such a network in 1938. Soon the network was expanded to cover other parts of China. The correspondents, primarily students, low-ranking government functionaries, apprentices, and workers, were grouped into units, which in turn formed branch stations. They were required to meet regularly for literary discussions and to send their writings to the headquarters for comments and corrections. The major aim was to train more literary personnel to serve the cause of the war of resistance and national salvation. This strategy was immediately copied by the writers in Malaya. After some discussion in 1938, they began to rally support for literary correspondence (文藝通訊, *wen-i t'ung-hsün*) in 1939. Then with the backing of several literary supplements, a Malayan version of the network was set up. Under the direction of the Singapore headquarters were no less than ten correspondence stations scattered all over the Peninsula, each having a group of members.²⁷

It is also interesting to note that in the question of literary form, the Malayan-Chinese writers again followed the opinion of their counterparts in China. In order to reach the masses, particularly the semi-illiterate villagers, the writers in Malaya, like those in China, also demanded that literary works should be more concerned with matters relating to the masses themselves and be written in language that could be understood by them. Realizing that it would be difficult to produce or publish lengthy novels in the deranged living conditions during the war, they pointed out that "poster-story" (牆頭小說), sketch (速寫), and poetry could be the most suitable forms under the circumstances. The importance of such traditional forms of expression as *shan-ke* (山歌), *min-yao* (民謠), *ku-tz'u* (鼓詞) and serialized fiction (章回小說) were dutifully stressed.²⁸ From what we have seen so far, it can be concluded that the literary trends of the Malayan-Chinese during the pre-war period, particularly during the 1930's, were always a reflection of the current literary fashions in China.

V

The reason the Chinese influence had been so easily established in Malaya was mainly due to the close and frequent contact between the Malayan-Chinese and China at that time. And the intermediaries that played the most important role in transmitting this influence were the writers

themselves. The majority of the writers who actively participated in the Malayan literary scene during the 1930's were immigrants from China. Some of them had already established their literary reputations before arriving in the Peninsula and many had been associated with Chinese literary circles before they left the country. While some of them might have emigrated to seek their fortunes in Southeast Asia, as did many non-writers, the majority of these intellectuals fled the country for political reasons.

The wave of Chinese writers pouring into Malaya began as early as the late 1920's. During this time in China, intellectuals who were Communist-oriented as well as those suspected of being leftists were on the run as a result of the pursuit of the Nationalist government. The Nationalist campaign to purge Communist elements, together with the Northern Punitive Expedition (launched in July, 1926), had driven a large number of intellectuals to leave the country and take shelter in Southeast Asia. Among them, many were literary activists. Partly because they were unsuitable for other employment, and partly because their talents were much needed there, they were soon integrated with the local men of letters in Malaya. Among this group of writers who arrived in the late 1920's were Hung Ling-fei (洪靈菲), Lo I-fu (羅依夫), Lin Hsien-ch'iao (林仙嶠), and P'ang I-hung (潘衣虹).

In the 1930's, the number of Chinese writers flocking to Malaya became much larger. Among the thirty-odd active writers in the Peninsula during the first half of the 1930's, none was born locally, and, except for three of them,²⁹ all had grown up and been educated on the mainland. During the later part of the decade, due to Japanese aggression in China, another group of writers, "failing to withstand the test of enemy bombardments," fled to Malaya. The coming of these writers amidst the war was ironical, for the Chinese in Southeast Asia were then fervently engaged in various patriotic activities, many even returning to defend China. In the eyes of the local Chinese, the coming of these mainlanders was a cowardly act. The "deserters" therefore received little sympathy from the local people. But thanks to these "deserters," Chinese literary activities in Malaya were invigorated. And it was mainly these writers who spread in Malaya the passionate concerns of China's *k'ang-chan wen-hsüeh*.

Among the typical examples of this group of immigrant writers is Yeh Ni. He arrived in 1936, and immediately set himself to advocate what he called *chan-shih wen-i* (戰時文藝, wartime literature). Nearly all his creative works were centered on the theme of national salvation. His "On

Wartime Literature" (論戰時文藝, Lun chan-shih wen-i) for example, provided one of the most complete sets of guidelines on such literature.³⁰ Also arriving in 1936 was another important writer, T'ieh K'ang. Beginning in 1937, he started to publish in local Chinese newspapers a voluminous series of writings and became the editor of an important literary journal. Among his important essays is his "Kuan-yü Nan-yang chan-shih wen-hsüeh pu shih-ho lun" (關於「南洋戰時文學不適合論」).³¹ And it was T'ieh K'ang who first introduced the system of a "literary correspondence network" in Malaya, modeled after that of China. His role in promoting the spirit of China's *k'ang-chan wen-hsüeh* in Malaya is beyond dispute.

The other Chinese writers arriving in Malaya at a later date include Wang Shih-chun (王實君), who after his arrival in 1937 joined the editorial staff of many influential supplements, Feng Chiao-i (馮焦衣), who probably came to Singapore after 1937, and of course Yü Ta-fu (郁達夫). Yü Ta-fu was already a famous writer before his arrival in Malaya on December 28, 1938. His role as an intermediary of Chinese influence in Malaya was manifest right from the beginning. Immediately after his arrival in Singapore, he was invited to Penang and was given a welcome dinner there. At the dinner, he delivered a talk on the activities of the Chinese writers in relation to the war of resistance in China. At the end of the dinner, Yü was asked a number of questions in regard to local Chinese writings, and he answered them later in an article published in the local press.³² Beginning in January 9, 1939, he officially took over the editorial jobs of several important local literary journals, among them *Ch'en-hsing* (晨星), *Fan-hsing* (繁星), *Wen-i chou-k'an* (文藝週刊), and *Wen-i shuang chou-k'an* (文藝雙週刊). In order to fill his supplements, he often sought writings from writers in China. A large number of them, including such famous names as Ai Wu (艾蕪), Hsiao Hung (蕭紅), Lao She (老舍), Mao Tun, to name just a few, all contributed to Yü Ta-fu's supplements. This is perhaps the most important part Yü Ta-fu played in his role as an intermediary of Chinese literary influence.

Another important channel through which Chinese influence was brought to Malaya was the reading materials printed and sent from China. The flow of these materials actually had started in the beginning of the twentieth century. The political-oriented book clubs and literary societies were ever ready to provide their members with abundant reading materials from China. Textbooks used in Malaya's Chinese schools in those days were printed in China, mostly by the Chung Hua Press and the Commercial Press in Shanghai.

The contents, as Victor Purcell points out, "were about China exclusively, there was no mention in them of Malaya's history, geography, trade, commerce, its mixed population."³³ In addition to propagandic literature and school textbooks, there had been a steady flow of other Chinese publications, in the form of entertainment or serious literature, through which the Chinese readers in Malaya were informed of the literary developments in China. Magazines and various literary works of the May Fourth era were widely circulated in Singapore and the Malay Peninsula. In the 1920's, works from China centering on the Chinese revolution were easily available. It was just the same in the 1930's. For instance, various important works on the Latinization of Chinese script by the *hsin wen-tzu* advocates in China were imported in great quantity into the Malayan market. Ch'un T'ien (春田), a Chinese writer in Malaya during the period, disclosed that "recently, journals on and textbooks in *hsin wen-tzu* were imported in large quantity and we in Malaya could therefore easily get hold of articles on the *hsin wen-tzu* movement."³⁴ According to P.U., who wrote in 1936, most of the major works on Latinization from China were then available in Malaya.³⁵

But this is not the only way Chinese materials found their way to the Malayan scene. Many were brought to the Chinese readers in Malaya through the pages of local supplements. The volume of local contributions was so small that it could hardly fill the space of local supplements. Ch'en Lien-ch'ing (陳鍊青), the editor of *Yeh-lin* (椰林), for example, repeatedly complained about the shortage of local writings. Consequently, most editors had to resort to reprinting materials extracted from publications in China. In 1929, Ch'en Lien-ch'ing disclosed that more than ninety per cent of the Chinese supplements in Malaya depended on newspaper cuttings from China. Even in the later years a number of supplements had still to rely on Chinese publications.³⁶

The presence of these intermediaries, however direct and effective they were, does not explain fully the immense indebtedness of Malaya's vernacular Chinese literature to the literary output in mainland China. The general poverty of the Chinese literary field in Malaya must be seen as the main reason. As we have seen at the beginning of this paper, the rate of illiteracy of the Chinese immigrants during the early part of the twentieth century was high and the introduction of modern Chinese education took place only in the beginning of the century. The absence of local talent to manage the literary field naturally brought on one result: almost the entire field was

completely left in the hands of the outsiders who were responsible for making Malaya's Chinese literature what it was.

The attachment of the Southeast Asian-Chinese to China in those days is another reason for the receptivity of the Chinese literary field in Malaya. It has been pointed out that in the pre-war years, the Chinese in Southeast Asia generally considered themselves transients, who were umbilically tied to China; very few would like to be identified with the country they lived in.³⁷

After the Japanese occupation, and with the change of government in China in 1949 and later Malaya's independence as a country in 1957, the interrelationship between the Chinese men of letters in Malaya and their counterparts in China has undergone drastic changes. On the one hand, no more Yü Ta-fu's were allowed to leave China, and even if they had been given exit permits, it is doubtful whether the Chinese in Southeast Asia today would extend to them the kind of honor and hospitality they once did some forty years before. On the other hand, the question of identity of the Overseas Chinese is no longer the same as before. The majority of the Southeast Asian-Chinese have become identified with the interest and aspirations of the country they live in. Chinese writings are of course still being produced and published daily in local newspaper literary supplements, or monthly in literary journals; but the thing that distinguishes the Malaysian-Chinese writings today as opposed to, say, the writings of some forty years ago, is the absence of a nostalgic attachment to China. With the rise of Malaysian consciousness among the Chinese in Malaysia, the literary field of the Malaysian-Chinese is no longer receptive to influence from China as it had been in the past.

Notes

1. This was partly because they could not afford to keep their families overseas and partly because the Chinese government took measures to retain the women folk in order to prevent the males from leaving the country permanently. The ratio of female to male in the 1850's was 1:12 in Singapore, 1:4 in Penang, and 1:3 in Malacca and even by 1911 there were only 247 Chinese females among every thousand males in the whole Malay Peninsula (Victor Purcell, *The Chinese in Malaya* [Kuala Lumpur: Oxford Univ. Press, 1948, rpt. 1967], pp. 86 & 88; Purcell, *The Chinese in Modern Malaya* [Singapore: Donald Moore, 1956, rpt.

- 1960], p.15).
2. Among the coolies, "nine out of ten smoked opium . . . they either gambled heavily or frequently patronized prostitutes" (Liang Shao-wen [梁紹文], *Nan-yang lü-hsing man-chi* 南洋旅行漫記 [Shanghai: Chung-hua shu-chü, 1924], pp.102-112). All translations are the present author's unless otherwise stated.
 3. Sung Che-mei (宋哲美), *Ma-lai-ya Hua-jen shih* (馬來亞華人史) (Hong Kong: Chung-hua wen-hua 中華文化, 1964), p. 87.
 4. For more information, see Lim Joo Hock, "Chinese Female Immigration into the Straits Settlements, 1860-1901," *Journal of the South Seas Society*, vol. 22, parts I & II, 1969; and J.D.Vaughan, *The Manners and Customs of the Chinese of the Straits Settlements* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1879; rpt. 1971), p.8.
 5. As the chief writer of the *Union Times* (Nan-yang tsung-hui pao [南洋總匯報]), happily noted in 1909, "there is more harmony among the various clans than there had been ten years ago" (*Union Times*, Feb. 18, 1909).
 6. For examples of some of these wealthy Straits Chinese, see Liang Shao-wen, pp. 23-29; and Song Ong Siang (宋旺相), *One Hundred Years' History of the Chinese in Singapore* (Singapore: Univ. of Malaya Press, 1967).
 7. The Europeans published their first paper as early as 1824. By the 1860's they managed to maintain four English newspapers though their population then numbered only about 95,000 (Chen Mong Hock, *The Early Chinese Newspapers of Singapore, 1881-1912* [Singapore: Univ. of Malaya Press, 1967], p. 17; and see also A. Kanayson, "The Newspapers of Singapore, 1824-1914," *Journal of the South Seas Society*, vol. 18, parts I & II, 1962-63, pp. 31-95). For information on *Lat Pau*, see Chen Mong Hock, chap. II, "The *Lat Pau* - the Pioneer," pp. 24-53; and Linda Tan, "Lat Pau - the Pioneer Chinese Newspaper of Singapore," *Historical Journal* (Singapore), 1963/64, pp. 7-10.
 8. For further information, see Chen Mong Hock, pp. 54-110.
 9. For a list of names of most of these societies and clubs, see Feng Tzu-yu (馮自由), *Hua-ch'iao ko-ming k'ai-kuo shih* (華僑革命開國史) (Taiwan: Commercial Press, 1953), pp. 89-91; and Huang Cheng-wu (黃珍吾), *Hua-ch'iao yü Chung-kuo ko-ming* (華僑與中國革命) (Taiwan: Kuo-fang yen-chiu yüan [國防研究院], 1963), pp. 78-80.
 10. For their views, see Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai (宋闕 Sung Yang), "Ta-chung wen-i ti wen-t'i (大眾文藝的問題)," *Wen-hsüeh yüeh-pao* (文學月報), inaugural issue, June 1932, rpt. in *Chung-kuo hsin wen-hsüeh ta-hsi hsi-p'ien* [CKHP] (中國新文學大系續編) (Hong Kong: Hiang-kang wen-hsüeh yen-chiu she [香港文學研究社], n.d.), vol. 1, pp. 485-492; Mao Tun (止敬 Chih Ching), "Wen-t'i chung ti ta-chung wen-i [問題中的大眾文藝]," *Wen-hsüeh yüeh-pao*, July 1932, rpt. in *CKHP*, vol. 1, pp. 505-513; and Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai, "Tsai-lun ta-chung wen-i ta Chih Ching (再論大眾文藝答止敬)," *Wen-hsüeh yüeh-pao*, Aug. 1932, rpt. in *CKHP*, vol. 1, pp. 515-531.
 11. Hai Feng, "Ts'ung ta-chung yü wen-hsüeh t'an-ch'i (從大眾語文學談起)," *Lun* (輪), Oct. 2, 1934, rpt. in *Ma-Hua hsin wen-hsüeh ta-hsi* [MHTH] (馬華新文學大系), Fang Hsiu (方修) ed., (Singapore: Shih-chieh shu-chü [世界書局], 1971), vol. 1, pp. 332-336; Chan Hsi, "Ta-chung yü ti shih-chi 大眾語的實際," *Ch'en-hsing*, Jan. 17, 1935, rpt. in *MHTH*, vol. 1, pp. 340-346.
 12. Sung Yang, "Ta-chung wen-i ti wen-t'i."
 13. Hai Feng, "Ts'ung ta-chung yü wen-hsüeh t'an-ch'i."

14. Sung Yang, "Ta-chung wen-i ti wen-t'i."
15. Mao Tun, "Wen-t'i chung ti ta-chung wen-i," and Ch'en I, "Shen-mo shih hsien-tai Chung-kuo p'u-t'ung hua [什麼是現代中國普通話]?" excerpted in Li Ho-lin (李何林), *Chin erh-shih nien Chung-kuo wen-i ssu-ch'ao lun* (近二十年中國文藝思潮論) (Hong Kong: Sheng-huo shu-tien [生活書店], 1939), pp. 393-394; Nieh Kan-nu, "Ta-chung yü ken t'u-hua 大眾語跟土語," excerpted in Li Ho-lin, p. 394.
16. Mao Tun, "Wen-t'i chung ti ta-chung wen-i."
17. Chan Hsi, "Ta-chung yü ti shih-chi."
18. Lu Hsün, "Han-tzu ho La-ting-hua (漢字和拉丁化)," rpt. in *CKHP*, vol. 1, pp. 691-692.
19. Lu Hsün, "Men-wai wen-t'an (門外文談)," rpt. in *CKHP*, vol. 1, pp. 665-681.
20. P.U., "Hsin wen-tzu yün-tung ti ch'i-lai (新文字運動的起來)," *Ch'u-pan chieh* (出版界), May 13, 1936, rpt. in *MHTH*, vol. 1, pp. 357-360; Chan Hsi, "Ta-chung yü ti shih-chi."
21. Chan Hsi, "Ta-chung yü ti to-mien hsing (大眾語的多面性)," *Ch'en-hsing*, Feb. 6, 1935, rpt. in *MHTH*, vol. 1, pp. 350-354.
22. See "Wen-i chieh t'ung-jen wei t'uan-chieh yü-wu yü yen-lun tzu-yu hsüan-yen (文藝界同人爲團結禦侮與言論自由宣言)," signed by twenty one established writers. For the full text of the proclamation and the names of the writers, see Li Ho-lin, pp. 573-574.
23. Yeh Ni, "Lun chan-shih wen-i," *Hsing-Chung jih-pao* (星中日報), Jan. 1, 1938, rpt. in *MHTH*, vol. 2, pp. 3-18; Ch'ing-lin Hsieh (pseud.), "Lun chan-shih wen-i ti chan-shu (論戰時文藝的戰術)," *Wen-i* (文藝), Apr. 3-10, 1938, rpt. in *MHTH*, vol. 2, pp. 19-24; Chin Ting, "K'ang-chan wen-i chiang-tso (抗戰文藝講座)," *Shih-sheng* (獅聲), Jan. 26 - May 20, 1938, rpt. in *MHTH*, vol. 2, pp. 25-45.
24. Chou Yang, "Hsien chieh-tuan ti wen-hsüeh (現階段的文學)," rpt. in *CKHP*, vol. 1, pp. 697-699 or Li Ho-lin, p. 423; Hu Lo, "Kuo-fang wen-hsüeh ti chien-li (國防文學的建立)," and Yang Sao, "K'an-le liang-ke t'e-chi i-hou (看了兩個特輯以後)," both excerpted in Li Ho-lin, pp. 419-420 & 422-423.
25. Chin Ting, "K'ang-chan wen-i chiang-tso."
26. Nieh Kan-nu, "Ch'uang-tso k'ou-hao yü lien-ho wen-t'i (創作口號與聯合問題)," in Li Ho-lin, pp. 480-481.
27. For more information, see T'ieh-K'ang (鐵抗), "Ma-Hua wen-i t'ung-hsün yün-tung chien-t'ao (馬華文藝通訊運動檢討)," *Wen-i ts'ung-t'an* (文藝叢談), Mar. 31, 1941; T'ieh K'ang, "Wo-men ti hua (我們的話)," *Shih-chi feng* (世紀風); and his "Wen-i t'ung-hsün ti hsieh-fa (文藝通訊的寫法)," *Shih-chi feang*, Nov. 6, 1939. Rpt. in *MHTH*, vol. 2, pp. 279-281, 270-271, 272-275, respectively.
28. For further information, see Ch'iu K'ang (丘康), "Chiu hsing-shih ti li-yung yü hsien-chih (舊形式的利用與限制)," *Ch'en-hsing*, June 3, 1938; Ch'ing T'an (清譚), "Nan-yang wen-i t'ung-su hua yün-tung (南洋文藝通俗化運動)," "Nan-yang chou-k'an (南洋週刊), no. 7; Shih Chün (實君), "Nan-yang ti t'ung-su hua wen-i (南洋的通俗化文藝)," *Shih-sheng*, Nov. 27, 1938; "Chang-hui hsiao-shuo ts'o-t'an (章回小說座談)," *Shih-sheng*, Dec. 23-24, 1938; Min-ke yü hsiao-tiao ts'o-t'an (民歌與小調座談)," *Shih-sheng*, Jan. 25-26, 1939; Mei Tzu (梅子), "Kuan-yü ta-ku t'an-tz'u ti wen-t'i (關於「大鼓」「彈詞」的問題)," *Hsin kuo-min wen-hsüeh* (新國民文學), Jan. 24, 1939. Rpt. in *MHTH*, vol. 2, pp. 96-98, 99-102, 108-111, 140-146, 147-153, and 210-212.

29. Ch'en Lien-ch'ing (陳鍊青), Jao Tzu-ch'uan (饒子鵬) and Li Jun-hu (李潤湖).
30. Published in *Hsing-Chung jih-pao*, Jan. 1, 1938, rpt. in *MHTH*, vol. 2, pp. 3-18.
31. Published in *Wen-i chou-k'an*, Mar. 13, 1838, rpt. *MHTH*, vol. 2, pp. 83-85.
32. "Chi-ke wen-t'i (幾個問題)," *Ch'en-hsing*, Jan. 21, 1939, rpt. in *MHTH*, vol. 2, pp. 444-448.
33. V. Purcell, *Malaya*, p. 232.
34. "Nanyang ti hsin wen-tzu yün-tung (南洋的新文字運動)," *Ch'u-pan che*, July 1, 1936, rpt. in *MHTH*, vol. 1, pp. 361-362.
35. For a list of works mentioned, see his "hsin wen-tzu yün-tung ti ch'i-lai"
36. "Yeh-lin p'ien-hou ti hua (III) (椰林編后的話 [三])," rpt. in *MHTH*, vol. 10, pp. 127-128. See also pp. 118-120, 121, 443-444.
37. Quoted by Wang Gungwn, "The Limits of Nanyang Chinese Nationalism, 1912-1937," in C. D. Cowan and O. W. Wolters, eds., *Southeast Asian History and Historiography: Essays Presented to D. G. E. Hall* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), p. 405.