

## *Networks of News: Power, Language and Transnational Dimensions of the Chinese Press, 1850–1949\**

Bryna Goodman, Guest Editor

What is the national identity of a newspaper? What territorial identities does it evoke? A few examples suffice to indicate the complexity of such questions. Consider the transnational trajectories of various editors, journalists and newspapers in China and in Asia more broadly, where foreign papers coexisted and intermingled with native language newspapers in treaty ports and colonial entrepôts. Since the late Qing, the Japanese government and Japanese journalists were active in China, shepherding the production of numerous Chinese-language newspapers, in addition to Japanese-language newspapers for resident Japanese. Prior to 1912, there were nineteen Japanese-owned Chinese-language papers, some established in the Chinese capital for the purpose of promoting diplomatic ties with Japan, and others published by reform factions in cities along the Yangzi river and in Fujian province.<sup>1</sup> In 1911, in partnership with the Chinese diplomat Wu Tingfang, the American journalist Thomas Millard

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established the *China Press*, which soon became the widest-circulating English-language daily newspaper in Shanghai. The paper was financed by the Chinese government and by US investors, including Charles Crane (the Chicago manufacturer who became US Minister to China in 1920–1921), and Benjamin Fleischer, who was also the owner (since 1909) of the Yokohama-based *Japan Advertiser*. In 1918 the English-language *Shanghai Gazette* was organized and funded through the collaboration of a group of Chinese who had spent most of their lives beyond China's shores, including Hawaii-educated Sun Yat-sen, San Francisco-born Liao Zhongkai, and Trinidad-born Eugene Chen. The monthly newspaper *Far Eastern Review*, established by the American George Bronson Rea, was first established in Manila in 1904, but moved to Shanghai with Rea in 1912. Despite Rea's citizenship, by 1923 *Far Eastern Review* was both anti-American and pro-Japanese, Rea having been subsidized by the Japanese.<sup>2</sup>

The geographic imagination expressed through newspaper format similarly indicates the complexity of newspaper identity, suggesting a variety of extra-national (and sub-national) imagined spaces left unexamined in Benedict Anderson's focus on the "imagined community" of the nation.<sup>3</sup> The Shanghai Japanese paper *Shanghai* (at times titled *Shanghai shûhō*), for example, interspersed news from Shanghai with news from Korea and Japan, suggesting that national borders were a less crucial factor in the selection and arrangement of news than the imagination of empire, present and future.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the Shanghai British newspaper, *North China Daily News*, included a regular section on "Outports" that provided news from colonies like Singapore and Hong Kong, in addition to Chinese and Japanese treaty-ports like Ningbo and Yokohama. If Shanghai was home to Chinese newspapers like *Shenbao*, and *Minguo ribao*, with their columns of national and local (Shanghai) news, it was equally home to papers like the *Ningbo baihua bao* (Ningbo Vernacular) and *Guang-Zhao zhoubao* (Guangzhou and Zhaoqing Weekly), published by sojourning native-place communities. These sojourner publications emphasized a different level of imagined community, that of the native place and the native-place networks that spanned numerous Chinese cities and in some cases extended beyond China, to sojourner communities in Southeast Asia. The Chinese press in early twentieth-century Japan provides another indication of the ways in which imagination of the nation was mediated through journalistic evocations of native-place community, as evident in the journal titles: *Jiangsu, Zhejiang chao* (Zhejiang Tide), *Yubao* (Henan).<sup>5</sup>

The articles in this special issue of *China Review* emerged out of a workshop on “Transnational Dimensions of the Chinese Press, 1850–1949,” held at the University of Oregon, on 25–26 October 2002. The workshop was organized to reflect on ways in which understanding the production, circulation and content of the Chinese press requires thinking beyond national boundaries. Our discussions focused, first, on the transnational production of the press in China (including professional formation abroad, translations from the foreign press within and outside of China, foreign ownership and registration of Chinese newspapers, and Western, Japanese and overseas Chinese journalists and journalism in China). A second general area of discussion involved the delineation of different levels of community — local, national, transnational — evoked in print by different newspapers, or by the diverse elements of a single paper. A third concern was a focus on the power relations that characterized transnational informational fields and networks, and the circulation and valuation of Chinese and foreign news and cultural content. This issue of hierarchy in global flows of news, barely analysed in considerations of the public sphere in China, has been articulated as a long-standing concern of Asian and other third-world journalists since the establishment of the earliest international press congresses.<sup>6</sup>

Recent discussions of Chinese nationalism have disputed the analytic relevance for China of several aspects of Benedict Anderson’s influential account of the development of nationalism. Historians have both questioned Anderson’s emphasis on the radical rupture of modern nationalism (emphasizing instead the complex interplay between modern notions of the nation and historically articulated notions of Chinese culture, ethnicity and political identity), and argued against Anderson’s overriding emphasis on print capitalism, and the spread of newspapers in particular, as facilitating the new imagined community of the modern nation. Prasenjit Duara and John Fitzgerald, among others, have suggested that it is more useful to distinguish between the modern nation-state and multiple nationalisms, which the state attempts to discipline in an effort to monopolize the meaning of the nation. Recent studies of Chinese regional and transnational identities have developed similar insights regarding the coexistence of multiple levels of imagined community that both invest and contest modern nationalism.<sup>7</sup>

National frameworks and nationalism have nonetheless remained dominant motifs in studies of the Chinese press. If the study of Chinese nationalism has diminished the persuasiveness of Benedict Anderson’s

claims for the radical nature of commercial print culture in newly creating an imagined national community, the identification of newspapers with the dissemination of modern nationalism has nonetheless continued to distract attention from other evocations of imagined community that may have coexisted on their pages. National frameworks of analysis have also worked to deflect analysis of the specific interconnections of local and foreign newspapers in semi-colonial and colonial contexts, characteristic, respectively, of media centres like Shanghai and Hong Kong. Press studies influenced by Jürgen Habermas's elaboration of a bourgeois public sphere have not analysed the extra-national dimensions of such a public sphere — in terms of news flows, journalistic networks, non-Chinese participants and alternative sites of publication and dissemination. Finally, studies of nationalism and the Chinese press have been insufficiently attentive to both the localisms of particular newspapers and the global circulation of Chinese nationalism in transnational Chinese print communities.<sup>8</sup>

This collection of six essays is conceived as a preliminary methodological and conceptual departure from prevailing frameworks for examining the historical significance of the press. Consideration of the transnational does not mean repudiation of the national; it does, however, entail an openness to recognizing the press as a vehicle for the simultaneous constitution of alternate identities and networks which coexist and contend with the national. It challenges, as well, the purity of the national, as examination of the specificities of newspaper contents and personnel reveals the dense interconnection of foreign and Chinese elements in the constitution of Chinese newspaper culture.

The articles collected in this issue explore, in various contexts, newspapers, journalists, language, ideas and news that circulated within and beyond key sites for the creation and dissemination of Chinese print culture: the colony of Hong Kong, the foreign settlements of semi-colonial Shanghai, the Qing political capital of Beijing and its Republican-era reincarnations, as well as emigrant-producing counties of Guangdong province that were concerned to maintain ties with emigrants who might reinvest in the welfare of their native place. The contributing authors concentrate on three interrelated arenas of transnational negotiations: practices of translation and the circulation of terminology and texts; the transnational flows of news, cultural works, and journalistic networks; and different levels of sojourning transnational readerships, invoked imagined communities, and actual communities of circulation.

Arif Dirlik provides a conceptual introduction to this special issue by

delineating the character and utility of the concept of “transnationalism,” in regard to understanding modern China broadly, and the modern press, specifically. In Dirlik’s analysis, “transnationalism” usefully queries the political and cultural identity of people, ideas, and institutions, and facilitates recognition of both “the persistence of the nation-state as the ground for economic, political and cultural activity, and of the forces that strain against national boundaries from both the outside and inside.” Dirlik suggests that transnationalism be understood as “not the erasure but proliferation of boundaries, which resist containment within the boundaries of nation-states and produce spatialities of their own.” Dirlik emphasizes, as well, the transnationalism of particular spaces — like colonial cities, treaty-ports, and non-Chinese cities with Chinese immigrant populations — that bring different nationalities into close proximity, albeit on unequal terms. Such locations were often fertile centres for the production and dissemination of Chinese newspapers, though the print culture that developed in these locations is not easily described through a Chinese/Western dichotomy. Lastly, Dirlik contextualizes the concept of transnationalism in terms of the study of Chinese history, both in terms of an earlier analytic focus on the role of imperialism in the making of modern China, and in terms of the issue of Chinese overseas and recent recognitions of the “dispersal in the meaning of Chinese and Chineseness,” and the role of the press in the “‘globalization’ of Chinese nationalism.”

The five articles that follow Dirlik’s introduction present research examining different aspects of transnationalism in the late Qing and Republican Chinese press. In her analysis of national and international characteristics of nineteenth-century Chinese newspapers in Shanghai and Hong Kong, Natascha Vittinghoff asks a question whose fundamental importance has been assumed rather than demonstrated: Does a press have a national character? Vittinghoff examines translinguistic interactions in the production of news and emphasizes the “hybrid transnational nature of news production.” Her article traces transcultural negotiations connected to the contentious development in the early Chinese press of a language for modern institutions, in particular, discussions over use of the term *yi* in reference to foreigners, and the exclusive reservation of the term *huangdi*, for the Chinese emperor. These negotiations involved parties from different segments of the Chinese and foreign community “cooperating in multi-layered networks.” Vittinghoff’s evidence undercuts common predispositions to assume the national identity of newspapers through the

national identity of their editors. She demonstrates, through an analysis of both editorial language and letters to the editor, that actual and intended readership was transnational. Her article also elaborates close ties among Shanghai and Hong Kong editors and the foreign community in both cities, as well as the movement of journalists between Chinese and foreign-owned establishments. Chinese papers nonetheless engaged in a clear strategy of self-presentation as Chinese. Vittinghoff argues, provocatively, that the dramatization of national identity of newspaper owners is best understood as a market strategy in a competitive transnational market.

Bryna Goodman's article on transnational networks and news flows in Shanghai similarly raises the issue of the complexity of newspaper identity, personnel and content for a later period, the early Republican era. Goodman surveys a range of transnational elements within the dense proliferation of May Fourth Shanghai newspaper culture, including translation, issues of newspaper registration and ownership, and the politics of newspaper identity. Through a close examination of one Chinese-language newspaper, the *Shangbao*, and the archives of the Russian Jewish American journalist George Sokolsky, Goodman evokes the complex ambiguities of the transnational human networks (involving Chinese, long-term expatriate foreigners and overseas Chinese) and news flows that invested Shanghai newspaper culture in this era, engaging a politics of growing nationalism. In the semi-colonial city of Shanghai, these networks were marked by linguistic and racial hierarchies that generated strategic alliances and publication strategies that belied the surface languages and identities of newspapers.

Other journalistic ventures were stimulated by the growth of Chinese global emigration. Elizabeth Sinn's article engages the early Chinese press from the perspective of the construction of transnational Chinese community. Her study, which highlights the importance of Hong Kong in both the history of Chinese journalism and the history of Chinese emigration, closely analyses the style and contents of the *Zhongwai xinwen qiribao* (the Chinese language page of the *China Mail*) and its call for recognition of "our people beyond national borders." Sinn uses this newspaper to trace a developing understanding of the phenomenon of Chinese migration and a new conceptualization of the relationship between China and Chinese overseas. By identifying with Chinese emigrants and telling sympathetic stories that emphasized personal experiences, the *Qiribao* "created notions of a global Chinese community." This journalistic sympathy towards migrants and the newspaper's agitation for

Chinese consular protection of emigrants contrast sharply with China's longstanding official disregard for Chinese who moved beyond China's borders.

Sinn's article recognizes the role of the press in both creating imagined national community and projecting extraterritorial and transnational identity (the notion of a transnational Chinese nation based on blood and familial ties). Sinn then raises the issue of the strong native-place ties that existed among emigrants residing overseas and suggests the manner in which multiple territorial identities coexisted, "each operative on different planes." There were, as well, multiple understandings of transnational community. The Hong Kong *Qiribao* evoked a nationally inclusive community of Chinese overseas. Local Sanshui *qiaokan*, in contrast, evoked "a village-level mini-diaspora," aimed at a narrow readership of perceived sojourners from the native place. In contrast, Sinn suggests that the *Qiribao* rose above a narrow emigrant mentality, demanding the formation of a national policy on behalf of all Chinese overseas.

Madeline Hsu's article addresses similar questions of identity and imagined community, through an examination of *qiaokan* that were published (and continue to be published) by Chinese localities to retain ties with individuals conceived as sojourning overseas. Through these publications, local Chinese organizations engaged in a journalism that aimed to "adapt transnational migration to the needs of local prosperity." The first *qiaokan*, *Xinning Magazine*, emerged in Taishan County, Guangdong, a major exporter of labour to Southeast Asia, North America and Australia. Through the pages of *Xinning*, Taishan leaders publicized local projects in need of investment and honoured overseas contributors with their names and photographs in print.<sup>9</sup> *Qiaokan* also functioned as transnational market-places. Though available across the globe in such locations as Los Angeles, Caracas, Rangoon, Melbourne and Papua New Guinea, the content of *Xinning* focused on Taishan and China, evoking both local and national sojourning identities for its target transnational population. Though Hsu's focus is *qiaokan*, her article briefly contextualizes *qiaokan* in terms of other Chinese-language periodicals available in the Republican era to the Taishan immigrants in the US, the different territorial and political identities each evoked, and tensions that arose in a conflict between the Ningyang Association (the Taishan immigrants' native place association) and the San Francisco-based Guomintang newspaper, *Shaonian Zhongguo chenbao* (Young China).

The final article in this collection, by Xiaoqun Xu, shifts attention to the intellectual content and cultural politics of the *Chenbao Fujuan*, one of the four most influential organs of May Fourth culture. Here the focus is the translation of foreign ideas, the identification and valuation of visiting foreign intellectuals, the personal networks that linked Chinese and foreign intellectuals, and tensions among different visions of national and transnational political and intellectual community. Xu illustrates these themes through the contrasting journalistic coverage of the visits to China of British philosopher Bertrand Russell, the anarchist Russian Esperantist Vasilij Eroshenko, and the Indian writer Rabindranath Tagore. Chinese press coverage of these visits and the work of these three figures clearly expressed hierarchies of intellectual value evidently associated with the different locations of their home countries. Xu is able to use journalistic tone and content to describe the power relations inherent in the transnational circulation of ideas, as well as the interventions of Chinese intellectuals with different personal and political networks, as they negotiated among the weighted intellectual offerings before them, selecting and translating in a fashion that best served their interests. Despite the evident complexity of the power field that infused the transnational circulation of ideas and individuals, Xu poignantly highlights the determination and agency of the Chinese intellectuals associated with the *fujian*, who generally avoided recognition or explicit engagement with global cultural hierarchies and imagined instead that their choices were free and unconstrained.

Together the articles in this volume present several important transnational dimensions of Chinese newspaper culture in the late Qing and Republican eras, including the cultural creations of colonial, semi-colonial and immigrant cities, the print communities available to Chinese overseas, and transnational networks of individuals and ideas that infused the Chinese press. It is the contributors' hope that these preliminary essays may stimulate further research on a complex topic that promises to redefine our understandings of the relations among newspaper culture, national, and other spatial imaginaries.

## Notes

1. These included the *Yadong shibao*, *Zhong-Wai dashibao*, and *Tongwen hubao*. Nakashita Masaharu, *Shinbun ni miru Nit-Chû kankei shi: Chûgoku no Nihonjin keiei shi* (Looking at the History of Sino-Japanese Relations via



- Newspapers: Japanese-run Newspapers in China) (Tokyo: Kyûbun shuppan, 1996), pp. 1–5.
2. Percy Chen, *China Called Me: My Life Inside the Chinese Revolution* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Co., 1979), pp. 44–45; Robert W. Desmond, *Windows on the World: The Information Process in a Changing Society, 1900–1920* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1980), pp. 203–5; Warren Cohen, *The Chinese Connection: Roger S. Greene, Thomas W. Lamont, George E. Sokolsky and American-East Asian Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 80; Hoover Institution Archives, Papers of George Sokolsky, 125.22.
  3. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1983).
  4. I am grateful to Yoshihiro Ishikawa for alerting me to the survival of this Shanghai newspaper in the Kobe University Library, and for providing me with his index to its contents.
  5. Bryna Goodman, *Native Place, City and Nation: Regional Networks and Identities in Shanghai, 1853–1937* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), p. 196, and “Being Public: The Politics of Representation in 1918 Shanghai,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 60 (June 2000), pp. 45–88.
  6. Walter Williams (ed.), *The Press Congress of the World in Hawaii* (Columbia, MO: E.W. Stephens, 1922). More recently, the complaints of third-world information spokesmen concerning international news agencies were voiced by Mustapha Masmoudi, Secretary of State for Information in Tunisia and First President of the Intergovernmental Coordinating Council for Information of Non-Aligned Countries, who called for a “decolonization of information,” estimating that “eighty-percent of world news flow emanates from major transnational news agencies [that] devote only twenty to thirty percent of news to developing countries, or three-fourths of mankind. Through this [filter, the transnational media] impose their own way of seeing the world.” Cited in Wilbur Schramm and Erwin Atwood, *Circulation of News in the Third World* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1981), p. 6.
  7. Anderson (Note 3); Prasenjit Duara, “Deconstructing the Chinese Nation,” in *Chinese Nationalism*, edited by Jonathan Unger (Armonk, NY, and London: 1996), pp. 31–55; John Fitzgerald, “The Nationless State: The Search for a Nation in Modern Chinese Nationalism,” in *Chinese Nationalism*, pp. 56–85; Goodman (Note 5); Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini (eds), *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997).
  8. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (orig. *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, 1962), translated by Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 1998), pp. 67–68; Fang Hanqi, *Zhongguo*

*xinwen shiye tongshi* (History of Chinese Journalism) (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 1996); Stephen MacKinnon, "Toward a History of the Chinese Press in the Republican Period," *Modern China*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (January 1997), pp. 11–13; Joan Judge, *Print and Politics: 'Shibao' and the Culture of Reform in Late Qing China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).

9. This tactic mirrored, at the local level, efforts by the late Qing state in the first decade of the twentieth century to solicit investment from Chinese overseas. Such efforts were often coordinated with offers of honours and titles. See Prasenjit Duara, "Nationalists Among Transnationals," in Ong and Nonini (eds) (Note 7), p. 44.