



# MEDIA AND THE CHINESE DIASPORA

Community, communications and commerce

Edited by Wanning Sun

# Media and the Chinese Diaspora

This book examines the role of Chinese-language media in the Chinese diaspora, focusing in particular on the Chinese communities in the United States, Canada, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Australia and New Zealand. It sets out the history of Chinese-language media and their relationship to trade and commerce – often a key activity of overseas Chinese – and outlines the patterns and mechanisms of the circulation and trafficking of Chinese-language media products. It considers the role of the media in forming and strengthening Chinese communities, and the production and consumption of various media narratives of being ‘Chinese’ in particular multicultural, multiracial and multiethnic societies. It demonstrates the ways in which Chinese-language media facilitate trade and commerce, and at the same time help to shape and negotiate the identities of Chinese communities. Overall, this book provides a rigorous appraisal of the role of the media in the Chinese diaspora, revealing a great deal about the vibrancy and dynamism of Chinese-language media, and showing how they play a crucial role in the changing nature of the Chinese diaspora.

**Wanning Sun** is Senior Lecturer in Media at Curtin University of Technology, Western Australia. She is Visiting Professor (2005–6) in Asian Studies at the State University of New York, Binghamton. She is the author of *Leaving China: media, migration, and transnational imagination* (2002), and is currently completing *Maid in China: media, mobility and a new semiotic of power* (Routledge, forthcoming).

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# Preface

As early as a decade ago, when athletes from the People's Republic of China marched into the Atlanta stadium at the opening ceremony of the 1996 Olympics, American NBC reporter Bob Costas reminded spectators of China's poor record on issues of human rights, intellectual property and threats to Taiwan. Costas' commentary initially eluded Chinese authorities and their official media, but the Chinese in diaspora – including students, academics, engineers and business people living in the US – took offence to the commentary. They wrote to American and Chinese newspapers to protest against Costas' unfriendly remarks about China. The Chinese foreign ministry subsequently took issue with NBC, demanding an official apology from the network and Costas. The Chinese media mounted a campaign encouraging and giving vent to anti-American nationalistic sentiments.

If the Costas incident can be read as a 'happy' story of different Chinese communities being united, via their uses of media, by a sense of pride and self-confidence, then a recent incident following the ban of the *Epoch Times* in Malaysia is evidence of the tension and fracture that continue to mark the transnational imagination of diasporic Chinese. On 12 August 2005, in an appeal to its readers, the *Epoch Times* – a globally circulated pro-Falun Gong, anti-Communist Chinese-language newspaper – called for signatures of petition to the Malaysian government to lift its ban on the paper in Malaysia:

Under pressure from the Chinese Communist Party, the Malaysian government has decided to ban the import and circulation of the *Epoch Times* in Malaysia, from June 2nd. . . . We understand that there are considerable investments in China from Malaysia's ethnic Chinese. These business interactions have provided CCP authorities with opportunities to infiltrate Chinese communities overseas in order to fulfil their own dirty political agenda. For the sake of defending the universal value of the freedom of the press, we appeal to the international community, governments of various countries, and spokespeople of various professions to put pressure on the Malaysian government not to succumb to the Chinese authorities.

(2005: A6; my translation)

Both the Costas incident and the *Epoch Times*' grievance are instructive, in that they point to the fact that the formation of a transnational Chinese imagination emerges from an interface between the material – the flow of people – and the symbolic – the flow of media images; a coalition of popular sentiments and state desire (including both the 'motherland' and 'host' states); and an overlap between the national and the diasporic.

Set within the conceptual parameters of such an interface, coalition and overlap, various chapters in this volume in their own way contribute to a picture of ambiguity and intrigue, demonstrating the complex contours of the Chinese diaspora and the Chinese transnational imagination. They also invariably complement and reinforce one another in putting forward an important argument that has hitherto been understated or even unrecognised in the study of Chinese diaspora: that the 'Chinese diaspora' is as much a discursive project as a material and socio-economic reality, and that the formation of any given 'diasporic Chinese' identity needs to be considered as a social and discursive process that is in progress – a 'work under construction'. Central to this process is the production, representation and consumption of the diasporic Chinese media.

I juxtapose the Costas incident with the *Epoch Times*' recent plea in order to show that the tensions and dynamics confronting the Chinese authorities and the Chinese diaspora have not gone away. To be sure, China has opened its door even wider, much to the delight or perhaps even pride of many Chinese overseas: China has joined the World Trade Organization, reclaimed Hong Kong, become the most important powerhouse in the world's economy at the beginning of the twenty-first century, made it increasingly easier for its people to go overseas for business or leisure, and is even considering allowing dual citizenship for its nationals. While diasporic Chinese communities may welcome and benefit from these changes, they continue to be confronted by, and feel compelled to respond to, a number of perennial 'China issues', including the international community's criticisms of China's human rights record, its (mis)management of the escalating tension with Taiwan, and the Chinese government's handling of international politics, especially with countries that have chequered historical relations with China, such as Japan. And it is through responding – not responding is also a response – to these issues, problems and crises that a spectrum of diasporic Chinese positions comes to be articulated and negotiated. It is my hope, and the hope of the other authors represented here, that the conceptual framework of diasporic media and transnational imagination mapped out in this volume will offer another analytical tool to understand this phenomenon of the 'Chinese diaspora'.

At an empirical level, one of the main aims of the book is to present accessible data and information – data that have so far not been readily available – on the Chinese-language media in some key diasporic locations. This empirical concern with the institutions, industries and political economy of various Chinese-language media outlets has both a historical and a

contemporary dimension; and, although the coverage of these topics offered here is not exhaustive, it is our hope that the work will serve as a useful departure point for further research and extension into areas of diasporic Chinese media not covered here.

The time it takes to produce an academic book can be quite long. In the case of this book, the idea of putting together a volume on media and the Chinese diaspora began to form in my mind soon after the announcement of Beijing's successful bid to host the 2008 Olympic Games. Thankfully, the book is coming out well before the Beijing Games. In my first book, *Leaving China: media, migration and transnational imagination*, which appeared in 2002, I predicted that the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing would be the most spectacular occasion to showcase the Chinese transnational imagination. The timing of the publication of *Media and the Chinese Diaspora* is perfect in this sense, for, although the book is not concerned with the 2008 Olympics per se, it nevertheless offers important insights – at both empirical and conceptual levels – that should enable people to 'read', understand and appreciate the events and potential incidents and issues that are bound to unfold prior to, during and after this global media event.

Authors in this volume hail from various key diasporic locations and speak about media and the Chinese diaspora from their own geopolitical locations and socio-economic experiences. Although writing from their 'home discipline', all but one of them nevertheless share the ambiguous status of being both insider and outsider in the pursuit of the topic of the Chinese diaspora. To all of them, I owe my gratitude for their unfailing understanding and support in bringing this project to fruition, and for rising to this important and challenging task so effectively.

My thanks as editor also go to Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, the series editor, without whose vision, entrepreneurship and continuous encouragement this volume might still be an idea lurking somewhere in my head. A number of people have generously helped in putting the volume together. In particular, John Sinclair and Justine Lloyd read the Introduction and offered useful comments, while Jane Mummary initially and then Carolyn Abbs were persistently patient, efficient and reliable in their editorial assistance and feedback. I am indebted to Jim Beattie not only for his support as a life-time partner but also for his patient and professional editorial help. Finally, I dedicate this volume to my mother in China.

Wanning Sun  
Curtin University of Technology, Western Australia  
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# Abbreviations

AATV	Asian American Television
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CACA	Chinese American Citizens Alliance
CCBA	Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association
CCC	Chinese Chamber of Commerce
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCTV	China Central Television
CMA	Census Metropolitan Area
CRTC	Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunication Committee
CTN	Chinese Television Network
CWMAA	Chinese Workers Mutual Aid Association
DAP	Democratic Action Party
ELICOS	English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students
ILU	International Longshoremen's Union
INTI	Association of Chinese-Indonesians
MCA	Malayan Chinese Association
Min Qing	Chinese American Democratic Youth League
NATV	North American Television
NEP	New Economic Policy
NZoA	New Zealand on Air
PKI	Indonesian Communist Party
PRC	People's Republic of China
ROC	Republic of China
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
SNPL	Singapore News and Publications Limited
SPH	Singapore Press Holdings
UMNO	United Malay National Organization
USCIS	US Citizenship and Immigration Services
VOA	Voice of America

# Introduction

## Transnationalism and a global diasporic Chinese mediasphere

*Wanning Sun*

Mention diasporic Chinese media and what springs to mind immediately is the plethora of Chinese-language newspapers published in various cities of the world. To this day, the print media continue to play a central role in the life of various Chinese migrant groups. Their production and consumption are location-bound and thus highly place-specific. After all, Sally Aw's newspapers would not have flourished in North America and Australasia without the addition of local content. This spatial specificity allows individuals regularly and even predictably to imagine themselves to be members of a diasporic Chinese community. In recent decades, however, we have witnessed a noticeable rupture in the regularity and predictability of this pattern, due to the unstoppable emergence of electronic media, including films, television programmes, videos and music, transported by technologies such as satellite, the Internet and other forms of more personalized mobile technologies. What is partly responsible for such a rupture is not only the multiplication of new and electronic media forms, but also the simultaneous and equally unpredictable and irregular movements of migrants across the globe. Alongside the flow of people and money, the traffic of Chinese-language media and cultural products across the borders of these countries and regions has increased not only in quantity but also more multi-directionally, forming a truly global diasporic Chinese mediasphere. Media images, in the form of DVD, VCD, VCR, films, television dramas and music videos – not to mention the Internet and satellite TV – have also proliferated and multiplied, reinforcing, destabilizing and challenging prior understandings of what it means to be Chinese. The 'Pop Culture China' phenomenon, referring to the dense traffic of popular music products, in various Chinese languages, crossing borders every day between locations, most aptly illustrates this scenario. According to Chua (2000, 2004), the most significant nodes in the corridors of traffic of Chinese-language music products are the People's Republic of China (PRC), Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, but they also reach into more peripheral ethnic Chinese populations in cities in the Asia-Pacific rim. In most countries and regions across the globe, these 'high-tech' and 'new media' Chinese-language or Chinese-content cultural products only add to, rather than replace, the long-existing



Chinese-language print media, which include dailies, weeklies and magazines, and which are already extremely diverse in terms of content, audience, ideological outlook and cultural affinity. While the diasporic Chinese mediascape may have become, in Appadurai's words, unstable and irregular, due to the fluid and deterritorialized global media and communication technologies, such a rupture nevertheless brings the promise of a 'postnational' or/and transnational Chinese imagination.<sup>1</sup>

As a consequence of the explosive development in the global Chinese mediasphere, Chinese people now living in most cities with a sizeable Chinese population in Southeast Asian countries, Australasia, America or Europe can expect to be exposed to a multitude of Chinese-language media outlets, catering to the specific and niche needs of each of the respective Chinese groups. In addition, most Chinese migrants now living in diaspora have also had access to Chinese-language and cultural products that are produced by and for diasporic Chinese communities elsewhere. Furthermore, courtesy of satellite television, including Rupert Murdoch's Star TV, and the Internet, an increasing number of Chinese communities outside China, Hong Kong and Taiwan can, if they so choose, view news, current affairs and entertainment programmes from their 'homelands'.

Take myself, a former PRC national now living in the city of Perth, the capital of Western Australia, as an example. A city of around one million people, Perth is now home to some 100,000 Chinese-speaking people, including migrants – of old and new generations – from Hong Kong, Taiwan and the PRC, as well as 're-immigrants' from various Southeast Asian countries. Altogether, around 10 per cent of these come from the PRC.<sup>2</sup> Perth is also the temporary home of many tertiary and secondary school students from these countries and regions, some of whom are hoping to graduate one day with a good degree, to get a job in Australia, and to become permanent residents here. One everyday practice of being Chinese that is available to such residents, besides eating Chinese food and speaking a Chinese language or dialect, is the consumption of a multiplicity of readily available and accessible Chinese-language media and cultural products. Again, take myself as an example. I maintain weekly contact with my family back in China via email and telephone, and visit China about once a year for family and work reasons. On a daily basis, I maintain my Chineseness through a range of choices I make in media consumption. Should I want to keep myself abreast of news and current affairs in the 'homeland' or want world affairs interpreted from a PRC perspective, I can turn on SBS TV (Australia's free-to-air special broadcasting station with a strong multicultural and ethnic dimension) and watch a 30-minute Mandarin news bulletin from CCTV (China Central Television) Channel 4 (Sinclair *et al.* 2000). If I want to spend my recreational time watching Chinese films or television programmes instead of local material or American and British imports, I can do so in a number of ways. For example, I could spend a couple of thousand dollars installing a satellite dish – affectionately known to many as 'the wok on the

roof' – so that I can access many channels from Chinese television. Or, if I do not want to commit myself to such a large investment, I can purchase specific television programmes of my choice on DVD or VCD, which are easily available from local shops specializing in Chinese-language cultural products. Or I can simply drop in at the local Chinese-language video shops in the city, where I can rent a video of numerous drama series – and very recent ones, too – from China for a small fee. Alternatively, if I do not have time for these time-consuming activities, I can just buy a copy of a Chinese-language daily such as *Sing Tao Daily News*, a Hong Kong-based newspaper chain with editions in North America, Southeast Asia and Australia, or pick up a complimentary copy of the *Australian Chinese Times*, a weekly tabloid-sized community newspaper printed in simplified Chinese characters, or *The Oriental Post*, a fortnightly paper in magazine format also serving the needs of the Chinese communities in Perth and WA in general, from any Chinese butcher's shop, grocery store or restaurant. Both claiming a circulation of around 10,000,<sup>3</sup> these community papers targeting local Chinese-speaking communities in Perth look humble in size and outlook, yet they provide me with all kinds of handy information that a 'Chinese' like myself finds useful, ranging from the contact numbers and opening hours of the Chinese consulate in Perth, flight details of most airlines flying from Perth to various Chinese cities, addresses of gift and souvenir shops specializing in merchandise well-liked by friends and families 'back home', updated guidelines and policies regarding entry visas to Australia, and information on how to sponsor one's parents to come to Australia. When visiting certain other parts of the world – say, Binghamton in upstate New York, home to a couple of thousand Chinese residents and students – I readily found a decent-sized Chinese grocery shop that also functions as a Chinese television drama video shop specializing in TV drama series from the PRC. Furthermore, if I want to read a Chinese literary classic but cannot borrow a copy from the local library, I can log in to [www.cnd.org.com](http://www.cnd.org.com), the Chinese News Digest, a website run by former Chinese nationals now living mostly in North America, which has multiple links to Chinese-language literary works, journals and magazines, and Chinese-language newspapers published in far-flung places. Confronted with endless media choices, my dilemma is not whether I can continue to be Chinese in another country; rather, it is how Chinese or what kind of Chinese I want to be.

It is a widely held and largely uncontested view that the formation and sustenance of any given collective Chinese identity outside China usually requires the healthy and continuous functioning of three institutions. They are: Chinese social and business networks in the form of a chamber of commerce, origin-specific associations, clans and kinship organizations; an education system that permits or even supports Chinese-language schools; and a Chinese-language media industry with sizeable circulation or ratings figures and some claim to community representation. It is an equally widely held – albeit less elaborated – assumption that these 'three pillars'

(Suryadinata 1997: 12) of any given diasporic Chinese community often exist in conjunction with one another. The cumulative strength that comes from the smooth working of such contiguous and combinatory relationships among these three institutions in a mainstream, non-Chinese host culture and society has manifested time and again, in a variety of contexts and circumstances. The Chinese-language media have, for instance, adopted an assertive and sometimes even combative position at different historical junctures when the legitimacy of Chinese cultural traditions or everyday practices has been called into question. For example, this is seen in the way the various elements of the local Chinese community in Vancouver used their newspapers to fight back, when that city's mainstream media demonized the Chinese community over the 'monster house' controversy (So and Lee 1995; Mitchell 1996, 1997; Sun 1998). Conversely, there is also ample evidence whereby a given Chinese community finds itself unable to assert its rightful place in a mainstream society and culture due to either a systematic abolition or suppression of these three institutions – the Chinese in Indonesia under the Suharto and Sukarno regimes immediately come to mind (Tan 1997; Cui 2002).

Given that the Chinese-language media have long been dubbed one of these three pillars, it is indeed baffling that neither a systematic nor comprehensive attempt has been made, either in the study of Chinese diaspora or in the study of the history of the press, to examine the phenomenon of the global Chinese media network. This glaring lack was again felt acutely at the Fifth Conference of the International Society for the Study of the Chinese Overseas, held in Copenhagen in May 2004, when there was not a single panel, nor indeed a paper, that was devoted to such a topic, whereas other domains, such as education, business and trade, and Chinese networks received their fair share of attention. To start filling this lacuna is a matter of urgency, considering the phenomenal scale of the global Chinese mediasphere and the infinitely fluid and dynamic ways in which it interacts with the movement of people, capital and technology, particularly in the current era when globalization has intensified – not to mention, of course, the implications of the rapidly growing impact of the export of Chinese nationalism from the PRC.

As a first step towards addressing this concern, I want in this introductory chapter to approach the topic of the Chinese diaspora from a media (and, by implication, media studies) perspective, and argue that a knowledge of the ways in which the Chinese-language media are produced and consumed affords us an important point of entry to understanding the formation of a truly transnational Chinese imagination, an essential component of a Chinese diasporic consciousness. While the meaning of the term 'diaspora' or 'Chinese diaspora' is not self-evident – in fact, it has different denotations to different people – here I do not wish to review the range of definitions and debates surrounding it. Suffice it to say that, while I use

the term heuristically to refer to a heterogeneous composite of Chinese migration groups, my approach to the 'Chinese diaspora' is informed by works that usefully delineate and eloquently demonstrate the heterogeneity of both 'diaspora' and 'Chinese diaspora'.<sup>4</sup>

My introduction has three parts. In the first part, I will delineate the imbricative relationships between community, commerce and cultural consumption of the Chinese media – what I perceive to be the three conceptual nodes constituting the analytical framework within which meanings of 'Chineseness' are constructed and contested. Proceeding from an assumption that the Chinese-language media are not simply reflective or representative of a particular diasporic Chinese imaginary but are in fact constitutive of it, I will demonstrate how the processes of media production, representation and consumption are integral to the formation of a Chinese diasporic imagination. In the second part, I will argue further that such a diasporic imagination is inherently transnational, and central to the formation of such a transnational imaginary is what I refer to as the 'transnational mediasphere', which, as I will demonstrate, is a global phenomenon nevertheless inflected with local concerns. Where relevant, I draw attention to connections between these ideas and particular chapters in this volume. I will then end my discussion with a brief summary of the content of each of the book's eight chapters.

### **Community, commerce and cultural consumption**

In recent years, scholars of various disciplines – in particular, anthropology, geography and cultural history – have turned their attention to the phenomenon of the Chinese diaspora. In his thorough discussion of space, place and the Chinese diaspora, Laurence Ma argues for a spatial turn, claiming that 'diaspora can be a process, a group of people, a geographic area and a spatial network' (2003: 8). In considering diaspora as a 'process' and a 'spatial network', Ma emphasizes the significance of 'connectivity, exchange, and [the] spread of people, goods, ideas and information across networked space and among a number of places with varying degrees of intensity and directionality' (2003: 8). I interpret Ma's emphasis on diasporic places and space as a departure from, if not a rejection of, a notion of the Chinese diaspora as being 'ungrounded' and 'deterritorialized', a view made well known in Ong and Nonini's (1997) work on Chinese cultural transnationalism. While the two views are not, it seems to me, fundamentally at odds – they are differentiated not so much by empirical accuracy as by disciplinary emphasis – this tension can nevertheless be productively exploited if we are to regard the diasporic place as both symbolic and material, and the diasporic network as both imaginary and real. Furthermore, this symbiotic relationship between the imaginary and the real place and space can be explored most fruitfully if the Chinese diaspora is also approached from a media – and, by implication, media studies – perspective.

A few points need to be made in order to unpack this statement. Diasporic Chinese media networks are, first and foremost, the consequences of a series of entrepreneurial initiatives, and, as such, operate according to the logic of a material as well as symbolic economy. This point is clearly demonstrated in Min Zhou *et al.*'s account of the Chinese-language media in the US (Chapter 2), Jia Gao's account in Australia (Chapter 7) and Manying Ip's account of its counterpart in New Zealand (Chapter 8). Add to this the legend of the expansion of the Aw family's 'Tiger Balm' empire from the end of the nineteenth century to the present – one of the triumphs of transnational capitalism and modernity Chinese-style. Originally emigrating from Yongding County, Fujian Province, in Southeast China, to Rangoon, Burma, the Aw family started a family-owned, family-operated business in Rangoon, selling medicines. In 1923, the family produced a humble medicine called Tiger Balm, which was based on a family remedy, and started marketing it locally. Sales grew and the empire spread to China and Hong Kong, and gradually the rest of Asia, Europe and the US, its products becoming household names in such far-flung places as the Caribbean, South America and Africa.

The Aw family's transnational network of capital accumulation is not limited to Tiger Balm, however. In 1929, Aw Boon Haw, the son of the Fujian migrant, started *Sing Chew Jit Pao* (*Sing Jew Daily News*) in Singapore in order to promote the famous family medicine. In so doing, he started an equally successful family business: a global Chinese newspaper chain. In August 1938, *Sing Tao Daily News* was launched in Hong Kong, marking the beginning of an unstoppable expansion of a global newspaper network. From the 1950s, the famous 'Tiger girl', Sally Aw Sian, Aw Boon Haw's daughter, inherited the *Sing Tao Jih Pao* newspaper, and expanded her father's press empire by publishing editions of this Chinese-language paper offshore. Now, via satellite, the paper is produced and circulated in Sydney, Auckland, London, San Francisco, New York, Toronto and Vancouver. Sally Aw's other papers include the *Sing Tao Evening Paper*, the *Tin Tin Daily News* and the *Hong Kong Standard*.

Unlike Tiger Balm and pharmaceutical products, the global Chinese media networks, in spite of their material and infrastructural dimensions, are cultural products. The story of the extension of the Taiwan-based *World Journal* to the various North American markets from the 1960s to the 1990s, similar to that of the expansion of the Hong Kong-based *Sing Tao Daily News*, reveals a desire to follow in the footprints of Chinese migrants and money flowing outwards, be they 'yacht immigrants' or 'boat people',<sup>5</sup> so as to profit from their desire to feel 'at home' through daily consumption of Chinese cultural products. Like exported merchandise, these newspapers are 'ungrounded' in one sense – the bulk of the paper is designed and transmitted to its overseas locations via satellite for local production. However, these newspapers also have a strong spatial dimension, because they continue to evoke a sense of geography and territorial identity, be it that of Hong

Kong or Taiwan. This process of the newspapers becoming first of all displaced from their home base and then emplaced in the new continents is not unique to the diasporic scenario. Evidence from sojourner publications in Republican Shanghai allows Goodman (2004b: 1) to observe, for instance, that 'the geographic imagination expressed through newspapers suggests a multiplicity of newspaper identities and readerships, including a variety of local and transnational imagined spaces'. This process of conjuring up a sense of geography through newspaper consumption is most effectively unravelled in Chua Beng Huat's analysis (Chapter 3) of the ways in which local newspapers such as the *Lianhe Zaobao* cover the whereabouts of Chinese pop artists for their Singaporean readers.

Like *Sing Tao*, which extended its influence from Hong Kong to other continents, the United Daily News Group, a media conglomerate based in Taiwan, also succeeded in expanding its presence in North America, Europe and Southeast Asia in the 1960s and 1970s (So and Lee 1995). These Chinese media enterprises were able to turn the business of running local newspapers into profitable global Chinese media conglomerates precisely because of the fact that Chinese communities were displaced, dispersed and spread over a number of continents across the globe. The narrative of the development of global Chinese media networks is a narrative of capitalist expansion and accumulation, characteristics of what Nonini and Ong refer to as the Chinese version of capitalism. It is therefore somewhat surprising that, given the prominence of these Chinese publications in the Chinatowns of most global cities, accounts of Chinese transnational business networks seldom consider the history of the empire building of these global Chinese newspaper conglomerates. This is also in spite of the fact that historians often turn to newspapers of the time for evidence of social formations of the Chinese migrant communities; and that these expansions of the Chinese media networks not only preceded that of Rupert Murdoch, but are hardly less ambitious in nature, and certainly much more culturally serviceable to their targeted markets.

While this is not unique to the diasporic Chinese media, what does set them apart from most mainstream media outlets is that most of the advertising dollars in the Chinese-language media in diaspora come from niche businesses catering to their own community (Ip 2003a). In addition, given that a significant proportion of their column space is devoted to advertising, the profit of running the newspaper often comes exclusively from advertising dollars, hence the common phenomenon of complimentary, weekly newspapers. The religiously maintained dichotomy in Western journalism between news and opinion, between information and advertising, is thereby rendered unnecessary or irrelevant. Since readers do not have to pay for these publications, they can hardly expect them to be objective or bias-free. Unlike their Western counterparts, for which promoting business interests is deemed to be unethical, many of these publications are developed unambiguously and unapologetically for purposes of promoting trade in certain

products. Such a practice has its historical predecessors. In the same way that *Sing Chew Jit Pao* in Singapore was started in 1929 by the Aw family to promote its Tiger Balm product and other pharmaceutical products, the Malaysian Chinese newspaper *Nanyang Siang Pau* (*Nanyang Business Daily*) was established by well-known business tycoon-cum-cultural philanthropist Tan Kah Kee (Chen Jiageng) in 1923 to promote rubber-related products (Cui 2002).

What further sets the ethnic Chinese media apart from some other 'ethnic media', then, is that the Chinese diaspora, at least prior to the 1960s, is primarily trade-based (Ma 2003) and, as such, information pertaining to trade, commerce, business personalities, activities and networks became the *raison d'être* for the very existence of these media industries. Given that many migration groups in Chinese diaspora find themselves in a politically marginal and economically central position (Hsing 2003; Rigg 2003), the mission of defending the economic interests of Chinese business and trade activities against a dominant polity is a matter of survival and thus a core concern for the media. Both Khor Yoke Lim and Ng Miew Luan's discussion of the Chinese press in Malaysia (Chapter 6) and Chang-yau Hoon's study of the Chinese minorities in Indonesia (Chapter 4) reinforce this point. The domain of trade and commerce, instead of belonging to a specific segment of what is usually referred to as 'business journalism' in the West, constitutes the very setting and environs in which the day's news and current affairs unfold. In other words, it is logical rather than fortuitous that trade and commercial activities engender, on a daily basis, the staple fodder for the five Ws of journalism for most diasporic Chinese media outlets, reporting *who* is doing *what* to whom at what time (*when*) and in what location (*where*) and for what reason (*why*).

These diasporic Chinese media networks can be regarded as not only a metaphor for a global Chinese capitalism, but also a metonym of the Andersonian 'print capitalism', because, by implication, they facilitate the inevitable process of what Anderson (1983) famously describes as the imagining of a community.<sup>6</sup> What is unfortunate, however, with the status of 'ethnic' media is that, while existing alongside the mainstream media, they tend to fall either under the threshold of visibility when the object of investigation is the 'national media', or into the crevice between national media and 'global media'. Hence, they are usually perceived to be of little or no consequence in the process of a singular national imagining (Sinclair and Cunningham 2000). This is not the place to argue for the inclusion of the ethnic media in considering the construction of nationhood; suffice it to say that it is crucially important and necessary. My point here is that, while Anderson's concept of 'imagined community' and its implications for understanding the media's role in the formation of collective identity has become widely accepted wisdom, its intellectual relevance to the study of diasporic Chinese media has been largely unexplored. This is in spite of the fact that the important connection between media and diasporic communities has been

long-established in other cultural contexts (e.g. Cunningham and Sinclair 2000; Gillespie 1995; Kolar-Panov 1997; Mitra 1996, 1997, 2001; Naficy 1993, 1994, 1996, 1999a, 1999b; Skribis 1998).

The Chinese-language media provide an essential discursive space for the Chinese communities in various national and social contexts to defend their economic interests, promote commercial activities and argue for their rights to conduct trade in the Chinese way. To put it simply, the Chinese-language media play the following roles: first, negotiating the tensions among divergent views and interests within the Chinese communities; second, representing and communicating the sentiments of the Chinese communities to the government and mainstream society; and, third, to report back to the Chinese communities the views and opinions of mainstream society. All the chapters in this volume, without exception, demonstrate that the Chinese-language media indeed assume some, if not all, of these roles. Diasporic space is not just, as Ma (2003) rightly observes, the 'space of capital flows'; it is also the space of information flows and, as such, I maintain, it operates in a number of ways.

First, diasporic media, by speaking to the Chinese audiences among certain migrant groups in a given geographic location, make it possible to imagine a place-based identity; for instance, 'the Chinese communities in Sarawak' or 'the Chinese in Vancouver'. Second, diasporic media enable such imagining to take place at supranational or 'postnational' (Appadurai's term) levels, allowing, for instance, the experience of the 'astronaut family' to have widespread resonance in spite of their dispersal in Canada, the US and Australasia. Last, consumption of Chinese-language diasporic media gives diasporic individuals a chance to affirm, on a daily basis, their cultural and social loyalty, thereby carving a diasporic subject position of difference. *The World Journal*, for example, evokes an imaginary geography with Taiwan as the primary place of belonging, whereas *Sing Tao Daily News* is unambiguously anchored in the place imaginary, privileging Hong Kong. Similarly, readers of the *Ming Pao Daily* can expect their fellow readers to be relatively younger, middle-class and cosmopolitan Hong Kong migrants; diasporic Chinese individuals from Hong Kong's older generations and working-class background are more likely to identify with *Sing Tao Daily* (So and Lee 1995); and diasporic readers of *China Daily* are most likely to be migrants from the PRC.

One important way in which newspapers facilitate the imagining of a diasporic community is the quotidian nature of media production and consumption. Newspapers, observes Colin Mercer, are a form of modern technology that affords a crucial device through which a certain sense of community may be inscribed. A diasporic community is 'narratable in terms of politics, business, military affairs, commodities circulation and exchange, and not in the least, petty pleasures, diversions and amusements' (Mercer 1992: 39). Diasporic media, like national media, also do a great deal of chronicling, i.e. recording newsworthy events in a routine fashion (Bird and