



Chinese Cultural Preservation, Identity and Community: Examining the roles of *Sin Chew Daily* in Bridging Chinese Education, Cultural and Religious Rights of the Chinese Community in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Since its existence, *Sin Chew Daily* (SCD) as the largest circulating Chinese press in Malaysia plays the role of bridging the Chinese community with the ruling government. SCD does this by informing the government of the day about the demands of the Chinese community in terms of Chinese culture, Chinese education and Chinese language in multiethnic Malaysia. As the Chinese culture is an important element to the Chinese community and as the indicator of their cultural identity, the implementation of affirmative action and ethnic based policies that favor the *Bumiputeras* (literally, sons of the soil) has been deemed as sidelining other Malaysians. As such, the Chinese community has taken up efforts of self-preserving the Chinese language, Chinese culture, and Chinese education and such efforts of preserving and safeguarding the Chinese culture are carried out through various platforms including on SCD. This paper uses content analysis to examine the efforts of Chinese cultural preservation by SCD as it highlights issues of education, cultural and religious rights of the Chinese community to the ruling government from May 1, 2012, to April 30, 2013, one year before the 13th Malaysian General Election (GE13).

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INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, one of the main roles and concerns of the Chinese newspapers is Chinese culture preservation that includes the preservation of Chinese education, cultural and religious rights. Chinese newspapers in Southeast Asia are sharing the same role and concern of Chinese cultural preservation. This is because Chinese communities in Southeast Asian countries usually exist as minority groups and hence the respective governments often neglect the practice and preservation of Chinese culture. This is where Chinese newspapers carry out the role of cultural preservation and such a role is very much welcomed and supported by the local Chinese communities (Chang, 2005).

Efforts of cultural preservation in Malaysia and Southeast Asian countries are related to the use of the Chinese language, which is the medium of the Chinese newspapers (Peng, 2005). The usage of Chinese language, according to Peng, is also a symbol of identity that distinguishes the Chinese living with other ethnic groups in their countries. The publication and distribution of Chinese newspapers indeed provide a suitable environment for the Chinese to learn their language. To Peng (2005), the initiative to save and disseminate the Chinese culture came from the Chinese newspapers, and this effort enables Chinese newspapers in Malaysia and Southeast Asia to continue their roles of preserving and promoting the Chinese culture. As the media and newspapers do not exist in a vacuum, Chinese newspapers carry out

its response to the society in which they originate from and serve an audience that directly determines their survival based on readership and circulation that influence the advertising revenues. The relationship between the media and society lays the foundation for this study of the Chinese cultural preservation agenda in *Sin Chew Daily* (SCD), the largest circulating Chinese newspaper in Malaysia.¹

Apart from disseminating information, providing entertainment and being a persuasive advertising tool, the Chinese newspapers in multi-ethnic Malaysia such as SCD share a common 'traditional' role of upholding the cultural preservation of the Chinese community (Peng, 2005, 2007, 2008; Siew, 2007, 2008). There currently exist thirteen Chinese newspapers: six are from Peninsular Malaysia, namely *Sin Chew Daily*, *Guang Ming Daily*, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, *China Press*, *Kwong Wah Yit Poh* and *Oriental Daily News*; and in Sabah and Sarawak, seven such presses. In Sarawak, the Chinese newspapers are *See Hua Daily News*, *International Times* and *United Daily News*; and in Sabah, *Overseas Chinese Daily News*, *Morning Post*, *Merdeka Daily News* and *Asia Times*.

SCD in its efforts of cultural preservations greatly concerns itself with issues of Chinese education. Since the times of British imperialism, Malaysian Chinese schools seldom receive governmental

1 The circulation of *Sin Chew Daily* was 293, 804 from January-June 2018 according to Audit Bureau of Circulation Malaysia's report. See <http://abcm.org.my/wp-content/reports/2018/abc-circulation-figures-jan-to-june-2018-newspapers-states-distribution.pdf>

support. As such, Chinese education has been a community enterprise that is supported by private funding since the British colonial period (Voon, 2008). Despite such efforts, the development of Chinese schools in Malaya (before Merdeka/independence) and then Malaysia (in 1963) was often restrained by educational reform proposals. These included the Barnes Report 1951 that suggested the complete removal of Chinese schools in Malaya; the Education Act 1952 that proposed replacing the Chinese schools with Malay and English medium schools; the Razak Report 1956 that proposed the final goal of the ‘one language, one type’ of school that would only use the Malay language as the medium for the Malayan/Malaysian education system; the Education Act 1961 that empowered the Minister of Education to convert the national-type primary Chinese schools to the national-type Malay schools, and the Education Act 1996 that aimed to materialize the final goal of Malaysian education as mentioned above (Huang, 2008). These proposals and regulations were deemed as ‘unfriendly’ to the Chinese community as they sought to restrict the development of Chinese education in Malaya/Malaysia. In response, Chinese educational non-government organizations (NGOs) such as The United Chinese School Teachers’ Association of Malaysia (教总/*jiaozong*) and the United Chinese School Committees’ Association of Malaysia (董总/*dongzong*) were established in 1951 and 1954 to work very closely with the government to preserve the rights to Chinese education.

Today, the remaining sixty Chinese independent secondary schools in Malaysia continue being dependent on the Chinese community for survival. Besides, the Unified Examinations Certificate (UEC), the standardized examination conducted by *dongzong* for the Chinese independent secondary schools, has yet to receive official recognition by the Malaysian Ministry of Education.² At the same time, the 1,297 national-type primary Chinese schools that only enjoy ‘half’ of the financial support from the Malaysian government remain reliant on the Malaysian Chinese community for the development of their facilities.³ As such, family and community sponsorship of Chinese education is a common occurrence due to inadequate access to official grants and subsidies from the Malaysian government. The Chinese community in Malaysia, therefore, is made to shoulder the entire recurrent and developmental expenditures of three (university) colleges, sixty independent secondary schools and a substantial amount of the building funds of most of the Chinese primary schools as education is placed highest in the lives of the Chinese community (Voon, 2008). The Chinese newspapers in Malaysia, including SCD, therefore frequently report on issues

2 See Ho (2015). In Sarawak, the late-Chief Minister, Adenan Satim officially recognized UEC and described the Federal government as ‘stupid’ for not recognizing this qualification (Jalil, 2016).

3 The allocation for the national-type Chinese primary schools from 2012 to 2015 was RM3 billion in contrast to RM14.5 billion allocated to national-type Malay primary schools. See *Jiaozong press statement*, 2015.

of Chinese education while raising funds for the Malaysian Chinese schools.⁴

As mentioned above, besides Chinese education, the rights of the Malaysian Chinese in Chinese culture and religion need to be included in the discussion of Chinese culture preservation. Yang (2002) asserted that the formation of the cultural identity of Malaysian Chinese was rooted on their geographical identity (地缘认同), dialect identity (方言认同), religious identity (宗教信仰认同), living custom identification (生活习俗认同) and culture value identification (文化价值认同) that they inherited from their ancestors from mainland China. In addition, according to Yen (2003), the Malaysian Chinese hold a strong attachment to Chinese cultural preservation since the early 1900s.

To most of the Chinese educated people in Malaysia, the definition of Chinese culture in a wider context includes Chinese education, Chinese language and literature, Chinese festivals and cultural activities as well as the Chinese guilds and association (CGAs). All these aspects are inter-related to each other. For instance, many of the CGAs were actively advocated Chinese education and Chinese cultural activities especially after the independent of Malaya (Yen, 2000), whilst the Chinese education is important in the transmission of the core cultural values, namely the Confucian values to the students

(Voon, 2008). On top of that, the development of Chinese language and literature is highly dependent on the development of Chinese education. Moreover, the introduction of Malaysian Chinese Cultural Festival (全国华人文化节) by the Federation of Chinese Associations Malaysia (华总, *Huazong*) in 1984 indicated the significance of Chinese culture rights to the Chinese community in Malaysia. The establishment of the Chinese Assembly Hall (华堂, *Huatang*) in each of the state in Malaysia, in addition to the formation of Federation of Chinese Associations Malaysia (华总, *Huazong*) in 1991 and the existence of Seven Major Clan Association (马来西亚七大乡团协调委员会) also shows the importance of CGAs in their efforts to preserve Chinese culture.

One of the characteristics of a multi-ethnic country such as Malaysia is the diversity of religious beliefs. Although Islam is the religion for the Federation, other religions are allowed to practice in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation. Article 11 of the Malaysian Federal Constitution (2010) clearly granted freedom of religion to all Malaysian. In this setting, Chinese religious rights become important in the context of Chinese culture preservation. Generally, the Malaysian Chinese follows diverse religions and beliefs. Some of them are Buddhists, Taoists, Christians or even Muslims. However, Chinese religion, to Tan (1983), has been misinterpreted. According to Tan, there are several misconceptions about the Chinese religion in terms of the classification of Chinese worshipers as Buddhists, Taoists or

4 One example is the Top Ten Charity Campaign organized by *Nanyang Siang Pau*, *China Press* and sponsored by Carlsberg Malaysia. Since 1987, this event raised funds for Malaysian Chinese schools (http://www.toptencharity.com.my/web/aboutus/au_about_us.php).

Confucianists. Nevertheless, to the general public, Malaysian Chinese are either the follower of Buddhism or Taoism.

The reporting of Chinese education, culture, and religious rights become important in Chinese newspapers, and particularly in SCD during the time of general elections. This is because issues pertaining to Chinese education culture and religious rights reflect the communal demands of the Chinese-speaking people who are also the readers of SCD. Besides, the related issues especially in Chinese education, also draw the attention of the Chinese ethnic-based political parties, including the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), *Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia* (GERAKAN) and Democratic Action Party (DAP) in their efforts to gain the support of the Chinese voters during the elections, and in the context of this paper, the 13th General Election (GE13). Hence, the study was conducted a year before the GE13 on 5 May 2013 because the general election is always the right time for the voters to bargain with the incumbents from the ruling and opposition parties. This paper on SCD, Chinese education, culture, and religion is also based on the political economy of the media during the GE13. It is an extensive research of Ng and Lee (2018) that provides a full 12-month quantitative data based on the content analysis of SCD from 1 May 2012 to 30 April 2013, with the purpose to further examine the roles of SCD in bridging Chinese education, cultural and religious rights of the Chinese community in Malaysia. In the work of Ng and Lee,

the authors only analyzed the content of the newspaper for three months, namely from August to October 2012. In other words, this paper provides more insights on the roles of the minority Chinese ethnic press SCD in bridging and representing Chinese education, cultural and religious rights one year before the GE13.

METHODS

SCD was selected as the research sample based on the nonprobability purposive sampling method. SCD also meets specific characteristics or quality of purposive sampling, i.e. it is the leading circulation Chinese newspaper read by the majority of the Chinese-educated people in Malaysia. The circulation of SCD from January to June 2018 was 293,804. As more than 1.18 million Malaysians read SCD, this makes SCD a highly influential Chinese newspaper in Malaysia.⁵

The one year research period (May 1, 2012 to April 30, 2013) was exactly a year before the 13th General Election (GE13) that was held on 5th May 2013. To collect the data, several units of analysis and their categories were identified. For Cultural rights, the categories are 1. News of local Chinese guilds and associations; 2. News of local Chinese festivals; 3. News of local Chinese cultural activities; 4. News related to the Chinese language; 5. News related to

⁵ See Audit Bureau of Circulation Malaysia's report (<http://abcm.org.my/wp-content/reports/2018/abc-circulation-figures-jan-to-june-2018-newspapers-states-distribution.pdf>) and Media Chinese International Limited official website (http://www.mediachinesegroup.com/htm/content.cf m?channel=biz&path=biz_05a&lang=E).

Chinese literature, and 6. News of Chinese literature workshops or competitions. For Chinese education, the categories are 1. News of local Chinese schools and 2. News of local Chinese education issues. For Chinese religious rights, the categories are 1. News of local Chinese temples and 2. News of local Chinese religious activities. Each of the news items would be analyzed based on the news highlights, page numbers, news sources, news slants and pictures used. The operational definition for each of the unit of analysis and category is shown in Table 9 (see Appendix).

After that, a coding descriptor and coding sheet were created to enable a more systematic coding process. Upon completion of the coding/ data collection, the data were

analyzed and presented in frequency and percentage. Microsoft Excel was used in both the data collection and analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Content Analysis Finding

A total of 3,329 news items were found during the research period for the three themes identified in this study. These items are Cultural rights (1462/ 43.9 per cent); Chinese education (1691/ 50.8 per cent) and Chinese religious rights (176/ 5.3 per cent). Amongst the three, news on Chinese education (50.8 per cent) was reported the most as compared to news on Cultural rights (43.9 per cent) and news on Chinese religious rights (5.3 per cent). See Table 1.

Table 1

Types of news

Types of News/Total	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Cultural rights	1462	43.9
Chinese education	1691	50.8
Chinese religious rights	176	5.3
TOTAL	3329	100

The analysis on news of Chinese education indicates that 59.8 per cent (1012 items) was news on local Chinese education issues while the remaining 40.2 per cent (679 items) was news on local Chinese schools (see Table 2). For news on Cultural rights, 65.6 per cent (959 items) was news of local Chinese guilds and associations; 11.8 per cent (173 items) news of local Chinese festivals; 11.0 per cent news (161 items) of local Chinese cultural activities; 5.4 per cent (79 items) news related to Chinese literature; 4.9 per cent (71 items) news related to

Chinese language and 1.3 per cent (19 items) as news of Chinese literature workshops or competitions (see Table 3). The content analysis also shows that out of 176 news of Chinese religious rights, 69.3 per cent (122 items) was news of local Chinese religious activities and 30.7 per cent (54 items) was news of local Chinese temples (see Table 4).

Analysis of News Highlights, Page Numbers, News Sources, News Slants and Pictures Used. The following discusses the content analysis of each news theme and its

Table 2

Total news of Chinese education issues

Categories/Total	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Local Chinese schools	679	40.2
Local Chinese educational issues	1012	59.8
TOTAL	1691	100

Table 3

Total news of culture rights

Categories/Total	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Local Chinese guilds and associations	959	65.6
Local Chinese Festivals	173	11.8
Local Chinese Cultural Activities	161	11
Related to Chinese Language	71	4.9
Related to Chinese Literature	79	5.4
Chinese Literature Workshop/ Competition	19	1.3
TOTAL	1462	100

Table 4

Total news of religious issues

Categories/Total	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Local Chinese Temples	54	30.7
Local Chinese Religious Activities	122	69.3
TOTAL	176	100

categories based on news highlights, page numbers, news sources, news slants and pictures used. The discussion is based on the most to the least reported news themes, namely 1. News of Chinese education; 2. News of Chinese culture rights; and 3. News of Chinese religious rights.

News of Chinese Education.

News of Chinese education was divided into two categories, 1. News of local Chinese schools and 2. News of local Chinese education issues.

The findings revealed that the Chinese education issues mainly highlighted by SCD during the research period were the issue of the establishment of SM Chong Hwa, Kuantan and the disputes of the status of the school as a private Chinese school or a pure Chinese independent school. The other issue highlighted was the issue of recognizing the Unified Examination Certificate (UEC). Others including the issue on the status of Chinese independent schools and national-type Chinese primary schools, as well as and the issue of the allocation

to all Chinese schools (including Chinese independent schools, national-type primary and secondary Chinese schools). Besides, the issue of the shortage of Chinese schools and Chinese school teachers, the relocation of Chinese schools, the controversy of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025, *dongzong* 926 and 1125 rallies was also the main highlights of SCD.⁶

Other than that, the Chinese community-funded colleges, namely the New Era University College, Southern University College and Han Chiang University College, along with the MCA party-funded Tunku Abdul Rahman University College and Tunku Abdul Rahman University were also highlighted by SCD. Other issues emphasized included the controversy of *dongzong*'s withdrawal from the round-table meeting, the criticism on the monolingual schools; the news on the Malaysian government to recognize the public and private universities in Taiwan and the news on the peaceful assembly to fight for the official status of the national-type secondary Chinese schools.⁷

6 926 rally was organized by *dongzong* on 26 September 2012 to pressure the government to give attention to the issues faced by Malaysian Chinese Education (Cai, 2012), and 1125 rally was organized by *dongzong* and other Chinese education organizations to advocate multiculturalism in Malaysian education system through the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 ("Yu bai huatuan", 2012).

7 The round-table meeting referred to the special committee set up by the Ministry of Education to address the shortage of teachers at Chinese primary schools. It was chaired by the then Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Education, Wee Ka Siong.

In terms of page numbers, out of the 1691 news of Chinese education, 82.0 per cent (1387 items) were published in the rest of the news section, 13.6 per cent on pages 2 & 3 (230 items) while 3.7 per cent (62 items) on the front page, which continued to other pages, and 0.7 per cent (12 items) on the front page (see Table 5).

Most of the sources of news of Chinese education were from *dongzong/ dong lianhui* (350/20.7 per cent), followed by "Other" sources such as individual sources, school authorities, exclusive interviews by SCD reporters and events organized by SCD (320/18.9 per cent); the *Barisan Nasional* (BN) government and other Chinese NGOs such as the Lim Lian Geok Cultural & Development Centre, the Board of Directors of Chinese schools and National Union of Heads of Schools (263/15.6 per cent, respectively), BN ruling parties (162/9.6 per cent), Chinese guilds and associations (91/5.4 per cent), *huazong/ huatang*, including *xue huatang* (89/5.2 per cent), *jiaozong* (43/2.5 per cent), unclear sources (41/2.4 per cent), *Pakatan Rakyat* opposition parties (30/1.8 per cent), PR government (14/0.8 per cent), *xiaoyou lianzong* (12/0.7 per cent), *dongjiao zong* (11/0.7 per cent) and non-ethnic based NGOs (10/0.6 per cent) (see Table 6).⁸

8 *donglianhui* (The United Association of Private Chinese Secondary School / 华文独中董联会); *huatang* (The Chinese Assembly Hall/ 华人大会堂); *xuehuatang* (The KL & Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall/ 吉隆坡暨雪莪华人大会堂); *xiaoyou lianzong* (The Malaysian Chinese Schools' Alumni Associations/ 马来西亚华校校友联合会总会); *dongjiao zong* (Alliance of *Dongzong* and *Jiaozong*/ 董教总).

Table 5
Page number

Page Number	Chinese Education		Cultural Rights		Religion Rights	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Front page	12	0.7	0	0	2	1.1
Page 2&3	230	13.6	49	3.4	2	1.1
Rest of news section	1387	82	1398	95.6	168	95.5
Front page continues to other pages	62	3.7	15	1	4	2.3
TOTAL	1691	100	1462	100	176	100

Table 6
Source of news

Source of News	Chinese Education		Cultural Rights		Religion Rights	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
BN Government	263	15.6	65	4.4	12	6.8
PR Government (Pulau Pinang, Selangor, Kelantan)	14	0.8	19	1.3	3	1.7
BN-Ruling Party	162	9.6	13	0.9	1	0.6
PR- Opposition Party	30	1.8	8	0.5	0	0
Dong Jiao Zong	11	0.7	3	0.2	0	0
Dong Zong or Dong Lian Hui	339	20	17	1.2	0	0
Jiao Zong	43	2.5	8	0.5	0	0
Hua Zong or Hua Tang	85	5	99	6.8	0	0
Xue Hua Tang	4	0.2	10	0.7	0	0

In terms of news slant, 67.5 per cent (1142 items) were reported neutrally, 31.1 per cent (525 items) pro Chinese education issues and 1.4 per cent (24 items) against Chinese education. For pictures used, a total

of 1524 pictures were found with the news of Chinese education. Among them, 86.9 per cent (1325 pictures) were coloured pictures and 13.1 per cent (199 pictures) were non-coloured pictures (See Table 7 & Table 8).

Table 7

News slant

News Slants	Chinese Education		Cultural Rights		Religion Rights	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Neutral/Balanced	1142	67.5	1351	92.4	164	93.2
Pro (related issues)	525	31.3	109	7.5	12	6.8
Against (related issues)	24	1.4	2	0.7	0	0
TOTAL	1691	100	1462	100	176	100

Table 8

Picture used

News Slants	Chinese Education		Cultural Rights		Religion Rights	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Colour	1325	86.9	1253	80.3	208	90.4
No colour	199	13.1	307	19.7	22	9.6
TOTAL	1524	100	1560	100	230	100

News of Chinese Cultural Rights.

News of cultural rights was divided into six categories. They are 1. News of local Chinese guilds and associations (CGAs), 2. News of local Chinese festivals, 3. News of local Chinese cultural activities, 4. News related to the Chinese language, 5. News related to Chinese literature and 6. News of Chinese literature workshops or competitions.

The content analysis shows that most of the news of cultural rights was news of local CGAs. Out of the 1462 news, 65.6 per cent (959 items) were news of local CGAs (see Table 3). The CGAs in Malaysia play their role as social and welfare organizations for the Chinese community, as well as act as an apparatus in expressing the demands of the Chinese community on matters involving politics, economy, culture and

education. The CGAs are divided into dialect organizations (*diyuan zhuzhi*, 地缘组织/ *tongxiang huiguan*, 同乡会馆), clan affinities associations (*xueyuan zhuzhi*, 血缘组织/ *zongqin xiangtuan*, 宗亲乡团), Chinese trade and guilds organizations (*shanghui*, 商会) or industry organizations (*yeyuan zhuzhi*, 业缘组织) and other Chinese associations. The news of CGAs was found throughout the twelve months research period.

Most of the news that was highlighted during the research period either related to activities organized by the CGAs, or their Presidents' comments on current affairs, especially those that affected their members and the Chinese community in general. For example, the main highlights were of the controversy of the bird's nest export;⁹ the issue related to the implementation of the minimum wage and the issue of closing Chinese cemeteries in Pengerang, Johor. Also, SCD highlighted the news of the annual assembly of *huazong*, the Associated Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Malaysia and the Federation of Malaysian Chinese Surname. Other news that were related to the dialect organizations, such as the Federation of Hokkien Association Malaysia, *Persekutuan*

Persatuan-Persatuan Hakka Malaysia, the Federation of Kheng Chew Hwee Kuan of Malaysia, *Persatuan-persatuan Teo Chew Malaysia*, *Persatuan Kwangsi Malaysia*, and the news related to the clan affinities associations, for instance, Huang Association of Malaysia, Malaysia Lim Clansmen Association, The Federation of Tan Clan Associations Malaysia, as well as the news related to the Chinese trade and guilds organizations or industry organizations. For example, Selangor Bird's nest Merchants Association, the Grocers Association, the Malaysia United Furniture Association, the SME Association of Malaysia, the Master Builders Association Malaysia, the Malaysia Heavy Construction Equipment Owners' Association, the Federation of Chinese Physicians and Acupuncturists Associations Malaysia, the Federation of Livestock Farmers' Associations of Malaysia, the Malaysia/ Singapore Coffee Shop Proprietors' Association and others, were some of the main highlights of SCD during the research period.

Out of the 1462 news of cultural rights, 11.8 per cent (173 items) were news of local Chinese festivals (see Table 3). The local Chinese festivals such as the celebration of the Chinese New Year (CNY) were the main highlights of SCD. The controversy of the Kedah state government CNY performance guidelines was also highlighted by SCD.

The findings show that 11.0 per cent (161 items) of the news of local Chinese cultural activities was found in the category of the news of cultural rights in this study.

9 China banned the imports of bird's nest from Malaysia in July 2011 due to nitrate contamination. Since then, the Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-based industry worked on new regulations that required Malaysian companies exporting bird's nest to obtain quality certifications.

The National Chinese Culture Festival and the National Chinese Culture Congress were some of the news highlights in SCD.

The study reveals that 4.9 per cent (71 items) of news related to the Chinese language was found in the category of the news of cultural rights. Examples of the news highlights included the National Chinese Debate Competition for the national-type secondary schools, and the issue of sending UPSR examiners who did not understand Mandarin to national-type primary schools in the Selangor state.

Only 5.4 per cent (79 items) were news related to Chinese literature. Some of the highlights included the competition of Chinese calligraphy and the Malaysian Chinese literary events.

There was only 1.3 per cent (19 items) news of Chinese literature workshop or competition found during the research period. Most of the news was related to Chinese literature workshops and competitions that were held throughout the research period. Examples of such events are the Flora Trail Chinese Literature Award organized by SCD.

In terms of the page number, out of the 1462 news of cultural rights, 95.6 per cent (1398 items) of the news of cultural rights was published in the rest of the news section, 3.4 per cent (49 items) on pages 2 & 3 while only 1.0 per cent (15 items) was found on the front page, which continued to other pages. No news of cultural rights was published on the front page of SCD (see Table 5). More than half of the sources of news of cultural rights were

from the CGAs (859/58.8 per cent); this was followed by the “Others” sources, such as individuals, school authority/principals, private company representatives, SCD events, publishers, NGOs, parents, Chinese literature competition organizers and so forth (136/9.3 per cent); other Chinese NGOs, such as University alumni associations and University Chinese language associations. (113/7.7 per cent); *huazong/ huatang*, including *xue huatang* (109/7.5 per cent); unclear news source (76/5.2 per cent); the BN government (65/4.4 per cent); non-ethnic based NGOs (27/1.8 per cent); the PR government (19/1.3 per cent); *dongzong/dong lian hui* (17/1.2 per cent); BN’s ruling parties (13/0.9 per cent); PR’s opposition parties and *jiaozong* (8/0.5 per cent, respectively); *xiaoyou lianzong* (5/0.4 per cent) and Chinese religious groups (4/0.3 per cent) (see Table 6).

For the news slant, out of the 1462 news of cultural rights, 92.4 per cent (1351 items) were reported neutrally, 7.5 per cent (109 items) pro cultural rights and only 0.1 per cent (2 items) were reported against cultural rights. A total of 1560 pictures were found with the news of cultural rights. Among them, 80.3 per cent (1253 pictures) were coloured pictures while 19.7 per cent (307 pictures) were non-coloured pictures (see Table 7 & Table 8).

News of Chinese Religious Rights.

News of Chinese religious rights was divided into two categories, 1. News of local Chinese temples and 2. News of local Chinese religious activities. The findings

show that 30.7 per cent (54 items) of the total news of Chinese religious rights was the news of the local Chinese temples (see Table 4). Examples of the news highlights included the controversy of the approval of the Chinese temple land title by the Selangor state government and the parade of the Johor Old Chinese temple. Besides that, 69.3 per cent (122 items) of the news of Chinese religious rights was the news of local Chinese religious activities and most of the news highlights in this category were related to the news of Chinese temples and religious, for instance, Buddhism and the Taoism. Less focus was given to Chinese Christian religious activities and news on Chinese Muslim religious activities were reported the least. Examples of the news highlights for this category included news of the visit of Taiwanese Buddhist teacher Venerable Hsing Yun.

In terms of page number, out of the 176 news of Chinese religious rights, 95.5 per cent (168 items) were published in the rest of the news section, 2.3 per cent (4 items) on the front page which continued to other pages while 1.1 per cent (2 items) was published on the front page and pages 2 & 3 respectively.

The majority of the sources of news of Chinese religious rights were from Chinese religious groups (125/71.1 per cent), followed by “Others” sources such as individuals, NGOs, students, the public, university principals and Chinese temples’ spokesperson (9/8.5 per cent), unclear sources and the BN government (12/6.8 per cent, respectively), the PR government

(3/1.7 per cent), non-Chinese religious group (2/1.1 per cent) and BN ruling parties (1/0.6 per cent).

The findings indicate that 93.2 per cent (164 items) of news of Chinese religious rights was reported neutrally and 6.8 per cent (12 items) were pro Chinese religious rights. No news was reported against Chinese religious rights. In terms of pictures used, a total of 230 pictures were published with the news of Chinese religious rights. Out of these, 90.4 per cent (208 pictures) were coloured pictures while 9.6 per cent (22 pictures) were non-coloured pictures.

Discussion

In discussing about Chinese cultural preservation, the content analysis shows that Chinese education is the main issue to SCD. This is based on the news quantity as well as the use of coloured pictures during the research period. Chinese education organizations such as *dongzong*, *jiaozong*, *dongjiao zong*, *donglian hui*, *xiaoyou lianzong*, and CGAs *s huazong*, *huatang* and *xue huatang* were the main sources of the news of Chinese education. The issues related to Chinese independent schools, the national-type Chinese primary and secondary schools were also the main news agenda of SCD. These illustrate the close relationship between the Chinese newspapers, the CGAs and Chinese education, which are always described as the three main pillars of the Malaysian Chinese community (Sim & Soong, 2007; Wong, 2011). As *dongzong* and *jiaozong* are the spokesperson for Chinese Education in

Malaysia and two major leading Chinese NGOs that strike for Chinese communal rights, specifically Chinese education rights, hence, it is not a surprise to find out that their voices were most represented in SCD during the research period. On top of that Chinese newspapers have the social responsibility to help to develop Chinese education, the Chinese education system in return produces potential readers for Chinese newspapers. This includes SCD.

The results of the content analysis also reveal and prove that SCD maintained close ties with the CGAs that represented the voices of the Chinese community in Malaysia. The CGAs also played the role of the pressure groups with regards to matters of government policies in Chinese education, culture, and religion. The role of the Chinese newspaper in preserving the Chinese culture is also shown in this finding. Evidently, SCD gave little attention to news of the Chinese religious rights of the Chinese community in Malaysia in comparison to news of Chinese education and Chinese cultural rights. This suggests that news of Chinese religious rights for the Malaysian Chinese was not as important as news on Chinese education and culture to SCD. In other words, the Malaysian Chinese are least vocal when comes to issues related to religion. The findings show that the Chinese ethnic minority press SCD was also cautious in representing religious issues in a country where Islam is the official religion and the religion of its majority populations.

From the perspective of media and society, the news agenda of Chinese cultural

preservation in SCD indicated that SCD played the role in responding to the needs and demands of the Chinese society in Malaysia. For most of the Chinese-educated people in Malaysia, the development of Chinese education is seen as important to the development of the Chinese culture that they inherited from their ancestors who migrated from Mainland China. The use of the Chinese language, the development of Chinese literature and the sustainability of Chinese culture through the practice of Chinese festivals such as Chinese New Year are crucial to the development of the Chinese community, especially in multi-ethnic Malaysia. To preserve the Chinese culture, Chinese language and Chinese education become one of the main agendas of the Chinese ethnic minority group in Malaysia, especially for those who are Chinese-educated. The existence of CGAs such as *huazong* and Chinese education organizations such as *dongzong* is seen playing the role of an advocator in this matter. This then explains the reason SCD gave more coverage on news related to the issues of Chinese education. The content analysis revealed that both CGAs and Chinese education organisations were identified as the main source of news for Chinese cultural rights and issues related to Chinese education. The importance of the voices of CGAs in the Chinese community was also proven, as most of the news found in the category of Chinese culture rights was news of local CGAs.

It is important to note that to most of the Chinese-educated people in Malaysia, the

Chinese language and Chinese education are important markers of their cultural identity or 'Chinese-ness' (Khor & Ng, 2006; Shamsul, 1999). Hence, this explains the reason SCD continues to represent the Chinese cultural anxiety as part of its traditional role, especially when facing the Malay-centric state power or the government led by UMNO who introduces and implements its mono-ethnic policies that are seen as 'unfriendly' to the Chinese language, Chinese education and Chinese culture, such as the practice of mono-ethnic language and culture policy in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the Malay centric economic policies in the 1970s. The role of the Chinese newspaper SCD in upholding the Chinese education and cultural rights by representing the related news as found in the content analysis of this study also echoed the work of Ang (2014) who asserted that the struggle of Chinese communal rights in Malaysia, especially Chinese education rights was built on rallies and campaigns mounted with the help of Chinese newspapers.

The political environment a year before GE13 had given more spaces to the Chinese ethnic minority group to voice their communal demand related to issues about education, culture, and language. The content analysis findings of SCD during the research period proved that the role to preserve Chinese culture is still 'marketable' especially when the multi-ethnic nation of Malaysia is still ruled by the UMNO-led BN government prolonged its Malay centric policies in all aspects of life of Malaysians. Hence, on one hand, the Chinese cultural

preservation agenda in SCD was a response to the cultural anxiety of the Chinese ethnic minority group, especially during GE13 and on the other hand, it was a response to the UMNO-led BN government and their ethnic policies. The Chinese cultural anxieties felt by the Chinese ethnic group through the representation of SCD is a typical example of the response of an ethnic minority press towards UMNO's *Ketuanan Melayu* (Malay dominance) in multi-ethnic Malaysia.¹⁰

From the perspective of the media and market, SCD as an ethnic minority press is highly dependent on the Chinese-educated community for its readership, circulation and subsequently the advertising revenue. Hence, it is important for SCD to represent the Chinese communal rights in Malaysia that concerning the issues related to Chinese education, Chinese culture and religious rights.

CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed how SCD performs its role as the mouthpiece of the Chinese community in expressing their cultural anxieties and demands to the UMNO-led BN government particularly before the GE13. The Chinese cultural preservation agenda is undoubtedly vital to SCD in terms of gaining the support of the Chinese speaking community and to maintain the survival of SCD in the current media market environment. This paper has also discussed how a Chinese ethnic minority

¹⁰ *Ketuanan Melayu* is a concept that has been used to frame the relationship between Muslim Malays and non-Malay citizens of Malaysia. For further reading see Liow (2015).

press responded to the state power during the times of general elections. On one hand, SCD succeeded in representing the Chinese communal voices and demands. However, by reporting most of the news in a neutral tone, it shows that the SCD failed to play the role as a discussion and debate platform in a multi-ethnic nation context in the issue of Chinese cultural preservation and 'Ketuanan Melayu'. SCD must provide the debate platform, for instance, to discuss how the two largest ethnic groups in the multi-ethnic nation of Malaysia can achieve a balanced point between Chinese cultural preservation and 'Ketuanan Melayu', other than merely reporting on the one-sided story that only represented the Chinese communal voices.

This study of -SCD was meant to examine how the Chinese ethnic minority press responded to Chinese communal rights (through the representation of Chinese cultural preservation agenda) in the multi-ethnic nation that is dominated largely by the Malays who are represented by the strong party-state of UMNO, the dominant party in the ruling BN coalition. The findings revealed that SCD was selling its cultural preservation agenda to maintain the pool of Chinese readership that contributed to the profit of the newspaper company and its owner. The fact is that the commodification of media has turned the media (in this case, SCD) into a commodity for profit and survival is always the bottom line of everything in the eyes of the media owners and their stakeholders.

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APPENDIX

Table 9

Operational definition for the study

1. News of local Chinese guilds and associations-The Malaysian Chinese Guilds and Association (CGAs) was formed based on the relationship by descent from the common ancestor or family relationship (consanguinity), occupation and geographical origin of the Chinese people in China. News of all Chinese organizations, which fall into these categories, was counted.

2. News of local Chinese festivals-This includes news on Chinese New Year celebrations, Autumn Festivals, and so on.

3. News of local Chinese cultural activities-This includes news about cultural performances, martial arts (Wushu), lion dance, music, cemetery issues, and so on.

4. News related to the Chinese language-This includes news related to the Chinese language or Mandarin in terms of its usage, development and others.

5. News related to Chinese literature-This includes news of calligraphy and books exhibition.

6. News of Chinese literature workshops or competitions-This includes news to advocate Chinese literature and workshops or competitions on Chinese literature.

7. Chinese Education Issues: refers to news of local Chinese schools and education issues.

8. News of local Chinese schools-This includes news of all Chinese primary schools, independent schools, converted secondary schools, the three colleges (presently upgraded to University College) run by the Chinese community, particularly Han Chiang College, New Era College and Southern College, and the MCA run Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) and Kolej Tunku Abdul Rahman (TAR Colleges; presently upgraded to University Colleges).

Table 9 (Continued)

9. News of local Chinese education issues-This includes issue on recognition of the United Examination Certificate (UEC) by BN, issues on teachers' Chinese qualification, the expansion of Chinese independent schools, the lack of Chinese teachers in primary, secondary and independent schools, issues on financial support from the state and federal governments, the degradation of decision making power by the school boards and issues on study opportunities of students in Chinese independent schools.

10. Chinese Religious Rights: refers to the religious rights of the Chinese community in Malaysia. It was reflected based on the news of local Chinese temples and religious activities. This includes news of Chinese Taoists, Buddhists, Christians and Muslims, as well as the issue of non-Muslim religious teaching in the schools.

11. Page Number: refers to the page number where the news article was being studied was located. There are four categories:

11.1 Front page-News article published on the front page of the newspaper.

11.2 Pages 2 and 3-News article published on page 2 and page 3 of the newspaper.

11.3 The rest of news section-News article published in the rest of the news section.

11.4 Front page continued on other pages-News article published on the front page that continued to other pages.

12. Headlines: refers to the news headlines in its original language. The headlines provided information on the most highlighted issues in SCD according to each news theme identified.

13. Source of the news: refers to the name of the individual(s) or organization(s) whose words were quoted in the article. There are ten categories:

13.1 Government-This was divided into the BN and PR Government (the States of Penang, Selangor and Kelantan).

13.2 Political party-This was divided into the BN and PR coalition.

Table 9 (Continued)

13.3 Chinese ethnic NGOs- This was divided into eight categories: (1) Dong Jiao Zong, (2) Dong Zong or Dong Lian Hui, (3) Jiao Zong, (4) Hua Zong or Hua Tang, (5) Xue Hua Tang, (6) Xiao You Lian Zong, (7) Chinese associations and clan associations and (8) Others (other Chinese ethnic NGOs that were not categorized into (1) to (7)).

13.4 Other ethnic-based NGOs-This includes the Malay, Indian and other ethnic-based NGOs.

13.5 Non-ethnic based NGOs- This includes all non-ethnic based NGOs, such as professional associations, student organizations, political party's supporters, labor union, and etc. concerned about environmental issues and human rights issues.

13.6 Religious groups-This includes Chinese religious groups and non-Chinese religious groups.

13.7 Others-This includes individuals, school/university authorities, police, Sin Chew Daily, Royalties or family members, private companies, and etc.

13.8 Not clear-This refers to news articles that did not state the news sources clearly.

14. News slant: refers to the direction of the news in terms of 'Pro', 'Neutral' or 'Against' based on each type of news.

14.1 Neutral/Balanced-News that did not support or oppose the related issues.

14.2 Pro-News that supported the related issues.

14.3 Against-News that opposed the related issues.

