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## ACCESS TO THE PAST OF A NATION OF IMMIGRANTS: ASIAN LANGUAGE NEWSPAPERS IN THE UNITED STATES

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Newspaper publishing in the United States can be traced back three hundred years to when the first paper in North America, *Publick Occurrences. Both Foreign and Domestic*, was published in Boston, Massachusetts on September 25, 1690. In the three centuries since then, over 300,000 individual newspaper titles appeared at one time or another. Those newspapers constitute a valuable resource for research in American history, since they have faithfully and vividly recorded the establishment and growth of a nation. At a time with no modern technology like television and radio to distribute information, newspapers were the most important source for people to get news and other useful information. Although newspaper publishing is already past its golden years, its role in American history cannot be underestimated. Naturally English is the predominant language in American newspaper publishing, but there are also titles in foreign languages, including Asian languages. These foreign language newspapers reflect the diversity of American journalism and are an indispensable source for researchers in ethnic studies, immigration history, social history, and even economic history.

### **Chinese newspapers**

Although there were many newspaper titles published in western languages other than English in North America in the eighteenth century, newspapers in Asian languages were not published until the middle of the nineteenth century. It is commonly believed that the first Asian language newspaper was the Chinese weekly *Golden Hills' News* published by Howard and Hudson beginning April 22, 1854 in San Francisco. It was a bilingual newspaper with an English editorial on the front page of each issue. In the first issue, the publishers claimed that it "will be published every Saturday, until the Chinese generally adopt it, when it will be published semiweekly." However, the *Golden Hills' News* had a life of only a few months. Nonetheless, although the paper was short-lived, it marked the beginning of the Asian language journalism in America.

The publication of the *Golden Hills' News* was not an isolated event. In the mid-nineteenth century, San Francisco was the center of the newspaper publishing business on the west coast of the continent. The key factor that contributed to the birth of Asian language journalism was the rapid influx of Chinese immigrants after the Gold Rush. 41,397 Chinese entered the United States from 1851-1860 compared to only 36 in the previous decade.<sup>1</sup> The majority of Chinese entered at San Francisco and settled in California and found work in the cheap labor jobs sprung up in the Gold Rush. The arrival of new Chinese immigrants, in combination with the flourishing newspaper publishing business in San Francisco, provided an ideal environment for the beginnings of Chinese journalism.

However, the initial years were extremely difficult for the Chinese press. Most of the papers did not survive more than three years, while the rest constantly changed owners. Several factors contributed to this. Although there was a rapid increase of Chinese immigrants, most of the new arrivals were uneducated farmers trying to escape the famine in their homeland. The number of people who could read was relatively small. At the same time, printing with Chinese characters did not come cheap. Because of high operating costs, the subscription fee was expensive compared to the wages earned by most Chinese. This resulted in low circulation which in turn deterred further growth of Chinese newspapers. Furthermore, the enactment by the United States Congress of the Exclusion Act in 1882 drastically reduced the number of Chinese immigrants and unfavorably affected the newly started Chinese journalism.

Nevertheless, during this period the presence of Chinese journalism in the United States was firmly established. Since very few issues of Chinese newspapers from the last century have survived, information on some titles is based solely on secondary sources. At least twenty-six Chinese newspapers were published in eight U.S. cities in the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Among them was the *Chinese Daily News* of Sacramento in 1856, the first Chinese daily newspaper published anywhere in the world. Chinese journalism (and later journalism in other Asian languages) began on the west coast of the United States and expanded gradually to the east coast, unlike journalism in English and other western languages which originated mostly on the east coast. The first Chinese newspapers did not appear in New York until 1883. This delay was mainly due to the small Chinese population east of the Mississippi river.

At the turn of the century, China was going through a series of political changes. Many future leaders of China studied for a time in the United States. Compared to the tough censorship in the late Ch'ing dynasty and the lack of public forums in which to express their ideas, they found newspapers in America a useful tool to seek sympathy from individuals and special interest groups in the U.S. Chinese community. The most noteworthy figure was K'ang Yu-wei, who founded the Chinese Empire Reform Association (Chung-kuo Wei Hsin Hui). In 1899, the Association took control of the San Francisco Chinese weekly *Mon Hing Bo* (*Wen Hsin Pao*), changed the title to *Sai Gai Yat Po* (World Journal) and made it a mouthpiece of the Association. The publication of *Sai Gai Yat Po* set the precedent for party affiliated newspapers, and many Chinese newspapers established thereafter had a very strong political slant. They were either party organs or financially supported by political groups in China. A few such newspapers were: *Chinese Vanguard* (*Hsien Feng Pao*) in 1927 and later the *China Daily News* (*Mei-chou Hua Ch'iao Jih Pao*) begun by communist sympathizers, *China Daily Times*, *Young China Morning Post* (*Chung-kuo Shao Nien Ch'en Pao*) published by the T'ung Meng Hui since 1910. In the 1920s all the major fractions of the Kuomintang (Chinese nationalists) had their own newspapers in the United States.

Chinese journalism in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century mirrored the turbulent social and political situation back in China. Changes in the situation there exerted tremendous influence on Chinese newspapers in America. From a business view point, political patronage added much needed capital to the troubled Chinese newspaper business. Many Chinese newspapers that were struggling for survival were consolidated by party patrons, with the result that they then had the capital to purchase new equipment and to introduce new printing

technology. The political situation in China also influenced Chinese newspapers published in the U.S. Due to the absence of censorship, rival political groups found America a better place for political debate than their homeland. To some degree, this in turn influenced political maneuvers back in China. For the local audience, those papers raised their political awareness and nationalist feelings. There was a steady increase of circulation of all major Chinese newspapers up to the outbreak of World War II. When the War was over, many Chinese left the U.S. to return to their homeland. With fewer readers, a sharp decline of Chinese newspapers in both numbers and circulation occurred. Some of them suspended publication while others barely survived by depending on subsidies from their supporters.

Since the 1960s, with the economic boom in Asia, some major Hong Kong and Taiwanese newspaper groups have tried to expand their business in North America by publishing U.S. editions. The first of this wave, *Sing Tao Jih Pao*, started daily publication in the United States in 1967. Its circulation reached 20,000 in the late 1970s and became the most popular Chinese newspaper in the United States. But, when many other newspapers followed its lead, *Sing Tao Jih Pao* met huge competition and was forced out of business in 1987. From 1982 to 1989 several other titles including *Chung Pao (Center Daily News)* also suffered huge losses and ceased publication. The most successful paper begun at this time was *Shih Chieh Jih Pao (World Journal)*, started in 1976. This paper inherited the name of the famous Chinese newspaper begun by the T'ung Meng Hui in San Francisco in 1899. It is today the most popular Chinese newspaper in the United States.

Since the adoption of the open door policy by the Chinese government in the late 1970s, there has been a rapid increase in cultural and economic exchange between the United States and China. Students, visitors, and immigrants began to arrive in the U.S. not only from Taiwan and Hong Kong but also from mainland China. This new trend changed the demographic picture of the Chinese in America and provided the Chinese newspaper publishing business something they needed desperately---readers. In the last 20 years, we have witnessed another surge in Chinese journalism, along with a more balanced range of products. In addition to nationwide papers such as *World Journal (Shih Chieh Jih Pao)* and *China Press (Ch'iao Pao)*, there are now newspapers published in almost all metropolitan areas with Chinese communities. The main goal of those papers is to address local issues and concerns. Digest-type newspapers, for example *Shen Chou Shih Pao (China Journal)*, *Mei-chou Wen Hui Chou K'an (Sino Times)* and *Mei-kuo Shih Pao (Asians Today)*, have also won wide popularity. Beside news briefs, these newspapers carry special reports and articles covering social and cultural phenomena of mainstream society and China. Today there are nine daily, thirty weekly, four semiweekly, and six monthly Chinese newspapers in the United States.

### **Japanese Newspapers**

Towards the end of the last century when immigration from China suffered a rapid decline due to severe restrictions placed on immigration to the United States from China by the Exclusion Act of 1882, there was a significant increase in immigrants from Japan. During the 30 year period from 1880-1910, the number of Japanese immigrants grew very rapidly.

Immigration from China, Japan and Korea  
 (by Immigration and Naturalization Service of the US Dept. of Justice)  
 Fiscal Years 1850-1990, by decades

Decade	China	Japan	Korea
1850	41,397		
1860	64,301	186	
1870	123,201		149
1880	61,711	2,270	
1890	14,799	25,942	
1900	20,605	129,797	7,697
1910	21,278	83,837	1,049
1920	29,907	33,462	598
1930	4,928	1,948	60
1940	16,709	1,555	
1950	9,657	46,250	6,231
1960	34,764	39,988	34,526
1970	124,326	49,775	271,956
1980	346,747	47,085	338,824

Although most of the early Japanese immigrants settled in Hawaii, Japanese journalism, like Chinese, was born in San Francisco. The first publication entitled *Shinonome* (Dawn) was issued by Japanese political activists in 1886. In 1887, a mimeographed weekly called *Shin Nippon* (New Japan) was published in Oakland. In 1892, a daily called *Soko Shimbun* (San Francisco News) was born in San Francisco. In Hawaii, the first paper was a weekly called *Nippon Shuho* in 1892. It later became *Nippu Jiji*, one of the most important Japanese newspapers in Hawaiian history. All these early newspapers were aimed at Japanese student-laborers, and their circulation rarely exceeded 300. A huge influx of new immigrants from Japan in the 1910s moved Japanese journalism from its shaky beginnings in the 1890s to the golden age of Japanese newspapers in the 1920s. Newspapers were published not only in places with large Japanese communities like Hawaii and San Francisco, but also in Los Angeles, Seattle, Salt Lake City, and Denver. In Hawaii alone, there were ten Japanese newspapers serving a Japanese population of 130,000. The combined circulation of all those papers was a little over 30,000 copies, with *Hawai Hoshi* being the most widely read paper of the region.<sup>3</sup> Other important titles during this period include *Rafu Shimpo* (1903-) in Los Angeles, *Ofu Nippo* (1907-1942) in Sacramento, and *Shin Sekai* (1894-1942) in San Francisco.

Unfortunately, this prosperity didn't last. In the spring of 1924, the United States Congress enacted a new immigration act which in essence terminated emigration from Asian countries to the United States. The impact of this legislation on Japanese language journalism was significant, since it cut the supply of *Issei*, the first-generation Japanese immigrants who were the primary audience for Japanese newspapers. Another factor affecting the earlier prosperity of Japanese newspapers was the maturation of *Nisei*, the second-generation Japanese born in the U.S. It is estimated that in the 1920s more than half of the Japanese population in the United States were native-born. Most of them grew up in the U.S. and spoke English as their native tongue. This

demographic change brought tremendous challenges to Japanese journalism. Young *Nisei* wanted to have channels to voice their concerns and opinions. They became a group of readers that could not be ignored. Almost all the Japanese newspapers began to add an English language section and later some of those papers were published completely in English. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, Japanese Americans were labeled enemy aliens. From 1942 to 1946, they were forced to leave their homes and transferred to ten detention camps located in the remote areas of seven western states. Many newspapers were suspended. In order to keep the Japanese in the camps informed of the community activities, the WRA (War Relocation Authority) published over ten camp papers in tabloid-format. These papers vividly recorded the life and hardship of the detained Japanese.

After the war, Japanese journalism continued the trend started before the war by publishing papers catering to the needs of the English-speaking Japanese population. Many papers ceased to have a Japanese language section. Today only a few titles still have a Japanese language section, such as *Rafu Shimbum*, *Hokubei Mainichi*, *New York Shimbum*, and *Chicago Shimbum*. In the past two decades, the satellite editions of newspapers published in Japan have further nibbled away at the market share of Japanese language newspapers published in the United States. Today, *Yomiuri Shimbum*, *Asahi Shimbum*, and *Nihon Keizai Shimbum* all have satellite editions distributed in the U.S. These papers do not have editorial offices in the United States, and even their advertisements are for the audience in Japan only.

### **Newspapers in Korean and Other Asian Languages**

Today, Korean Americans are one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in the United States. According to the 1990 United States Census, about 800,000 Koreans live in the U.S. In comparison with the Chinese and Japanese, Koreans came to America relatively late, beginning to emigrate from 1883 on. There is no evidence of any Korean publication before 1900. Between 1903 and 1907 a total of 7,226 Koreans settled in Hawaii and California. Most of them were exiles and immigrant laborers. Soon after their arrival at various plantations, Koreans began to organize themselves into mutual aid societies. The most powerful organization was Kungmin Hoe (Korean National Association). After Kungmin Hoe was founded, it began to publish in San Francisco its own newspaper called *Shinhan Minbo* (New Korea) on February 10, 1909. At that time, there were two other Korean newspapers published in San Francisco, *Konglip Sinbo* (Public News) or *United Korean* started on November 22, 1905 and *Taedong Kongbo* (Great Unity News) which published its first issue on October 3, 1907. *Konglip Sinbo* was probably the earliest Korean newspaper published in the United States. When *Shinhan Minbo* was started, it absorbed both titles and used Nov. 22, 1905 on its masthead as its date of establishment. *Shinhan Minbo* is the most important title in the history of Korean American journalism, and it is an indispensable resource for research on Korean Americans. Today it is still published monthly in Los Angeles.

In 1905 Japan occupied Korea and officially annexed it in 1910. Independence, understandably, was the predominant theme of Korean newspapers in the U.S. before World War II. Due to the limited population of Korean Americans before 1965, there were very few Korean newspapers during this period, and all of them were overshadowed by the presence of *Shinhan Minbo*.

Starting in the 1970s, the rapid growth of the Korean population made it possible for the Korean newspaper publishing business to enjoy a steady prosperity. Today the Korean newspaper publishing market in the United States is dominated by four major dailies: *Hanguk Ilbo* (*The Korea Times*), *Dong A Ilbo* (*Oriental Daily*), *Joong-ang Ilbo* (*Central Daily*), and *Segye Ilbo* (*The Sae Gae Times*). The first three papers have their headquarters in South Korea, and started their US operation during the post-1965 Korean immigration with the establishment of branch offices in Los Angeles. These three papers are very influential on the west coast of the U.S. *Segye Ilbo* has its main office in New York and is controlled by the Korean Unification Church. In addition to those four dailies, there are also some business and religious newspapers such as *Korean Street Journal* and *Korean Christian Times*.

As a nation of immigrants, the United States has admitted people from all Asian countries. Indians came to this country as early as 1850s, and Pilipino immigration to the U.S. can be traced back to the turn of the century. But, there is hardly any evidence of papers published in Indian languages, and there is only one small newspaper in Tagalog. This is no surprise, since English is the official language in India and a popular language in the Philippines. Newspapers by those ethnic groups in the U.S. are in English. In the mid 1970s, the Vietnam War created many refugees in Indochina. Many of them were resettled in the United States, and a wave of immigration from Southeast Asia began. In the past twenty years, the U.S. has admitted over one million immigrants from Southeast Asia. Among them, the largest group is Vietnamese, a large percentage of whom live in California. So many Vietnamese Americans live in Westminster, California that the city has acquired the nickname "Little Saigon". *Nguoi Viêt*, a daily started in Westminster in 1978, is one of the major Vietnamese papers. Other Vietnamese papers include *Viêt Nam tu do*, *Nguoi Viêt tu do*, and *Mekong Tynan*. All of them are published in California. There are very few titles found in other Asian languages. In Los Angeles, there is a Thai weekly called *Sereechai*. *Angkor Borei News* in Anaheim, California, is the only Cambodian newspapers in the United States.

### **Future Prospects of Asian Language Newspapers**

Newspaper publishing has never been a lucrative business. Today, faced with competition from other news media such as radio and television, even English newspapers are struggling for survival. It is even more difficult for ethnic newspapers, since their ups and downs are correlated to the inflow of new immigrants. The primary readers of those newspapers are first generation immigrants. The papers' prosperity depends on new comers. When the first generation is not around any more, the newspapers are either out of business or need an English language section added for those of the second generation. Today most of the second and later generations are assimilated into the American society, so they are generally not interested in reading ethnic press publications.

Even for first generation immigrants, things have changed drastically in the past century. Unlike immigrants of the past, many newcomers today are well-educated professionals. They have good English language skills, so newspapers in ethnic languages are not so appealing to them just for the language itself. In addition, people are less confined now to their cultural ghettos than in former days. They want to explore the mainstream society, so they tend to read more English

newspapers. Demographically, unlike earlier days when people lived in such physical ghettos as Chinatown and Koreatown, today's new immigrants live throughout the country. The newspapers have to be delivered by mail, so they can be several days late by the time they are received. This makes time-sensitive news obsolete. As a result, some digest-type newspapers that concentrate on special reports and serial novels have emerged in recent years. Since the information these newspapers carry is not time-sensitive, they are quite popular among Asian populations not living in metropolitan areas. Asian newspapers are tied to immigration, and predicting the future of the Asian newspaper industry is like predicting the future of Asian immigration to the United States. Unfortunately, considering the political and economic situations on both sides of the Pacific, the future of Asian immigration to the United States is unclear.

### **Access and Preservation of Newspapers**

By definition, newspapers are a tool to inform people. Ethnic newspapers have a function even beyond that: they are chronicles of immigration history and carriers of ethnic culture. "The survival of ethnic communities and ethnic life in the United States is largely a result of the continued existence of the ethnic press... The ethnic press maintains the 'ethos,' or 'spirit,' behind an ethnic way of life."<sup>4</sup> For researchers, newspapers are a valuable source of information about the past. Once lost, those vivid images of life in the past can never be retrieved. Although newspapers are of such important historical and research value, they are very difficult to preserve due to their ephemeral nature and bulky size.

A further problem is bibliographical control. Newspapers are also not easy to handle since title changes are so common and they usually have a long publishing history. In order to make newspapers accessible to users, there are three basic principles for bibliographical control: a) obtaining access to information about the whole periodical (title, frequency, publisher, and date of first publication); b) analysis of the contents of the periodical (subject analysis); c) guide to the location of periodical holdings in a particular library.<sup>5</sup> These principles were not easy to achieve in the past. Before the 1980s, there were sporadic attempts to make Asian newspapers accessible to researchers. For example, Karl Lo and H. M. Lai compiled *Chinese newspapers published in North America, 1854-1975*, a bibliography of Chinese newspapers with library holdings attached. A good feature of this kind of printed bibliography is that it can provide alphabetical title listings. But, it is impossible for printed bibliographies to reflect the discoveries of new title information and library holdings, since they cannot be updated regularly. At the same time, due to the number of newspaper titles and their dispersed holdings, it is very difficult if not impossible for individual bibliographies to cover them.

In 1983, a major effort for cataloging newspapers was launched by the United States Newspaper Program (USNP) under the auspices of the National Endowment for the Humanities. The goal of the USNP is to locate extant issues of all the newspapers published in the United States and its Trust Territories since colonial times; to enter their bibliographic and holdings information into a machine-readable database; and to selectively microfilm the most important titles for research. In order to obtain the original information, every state project is responsible for canvassing all local libraries, historical societies, and private collectors. All the bibliographic and holdings information of US newspapers are stored in the database of the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC).

The bibliographic records are maintained as a subset of the CONSER Program on OCLC, while the holdings records are kept in the OCLC Union List Subsystem. As of August 1996, all states have completed a USNP project or have one in process. Among them, 31 states and 2 US territories (Puerto Rico and US Virgin Islands) have completed their USNP project, while 19 states and the District of Columbia have yet to complete theirs. The OCLC database now contains approximately 125,000 bibliographic records and 400,000 holdings for the USNP.

As a state with large Asian populations and numerous newspapers in Asian languages, California started its own project at the University of California, Riverside in 1991. Asian language newspapers were found in several locations including the University of Southern California, University of California at Los Angeles, and University of California at Berkeley. UC Berkeley is close to San Francisco and, as might be expected, it has the most titles. By March 1996, Asian language titles at those places had already been inventoried and cataloged. This is an important milestone for preserving those newspapers. Now researchers can retrieve online bibliographical and holdings information of all the extant copies of Asian language newspapers published in the history of California, and they can make arrangements to borrow them from the holding libraries. A large percentage of those titles have already been microfilmed on 35mm microfilm. Others are in bound volumes. Eventually, all important titles will be microfilmed.

Once the USNP is completed, researchers all over the world with OCLC access can locate all extant copies of U.S. newspapers held in the United States. Certainly many newspaper titles that were not collected in the first place are lost forever, but we sincerely hope the surviving copies will be handed on to future generations since no text can provide more vivid images of the past than newspapers.

## NOTES

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