

【Special Feature Articles: *Chao Foon Magazine* and the Chinese Publication Network
in East and Southeast Asia during the Cold War】

Walking into the Mist of *Chao Foon*:
Unravelling Union Press Organization's Relationship with the United States

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Introduction

Chao Foon (《蕉风》)² was launched in Singapore in November 1955 by the Chao Foon Press (under the Union Press Organization: UPO, 马来(西)亚友联出版社) and moved its publishing base to Petaling Jaya, Malaya, with its sister publication, *The Student Weekly* (《学生周报》)³, in 1959. *Chao Foon* was published for 40 years, but temporarily ceased publication, after 488 issues in 1999 after the UPO was sold. However, *Chao Foon* was reinstated in December 2002 when the Malaysian Chinese Literature Centre (MCLC, 马华文学馆) of the Southern College (南方学院)⁴ published Issue 489, and to date, *Chao Foon* has published up to 515 issues (as of July 2023).

There is a wide range of information available on *Chao Foon*, as it has spanned a long period of time. It has survived the independence of Malaya (1957), the formation of Malaysia (1963), Singapore's separation from Malaysia (1965), and the suspension and resumption of the publication. Besides the works published in *Chao Foon* itself, it has two sister publications, *The Student Weekly* and *The Chinese Students Weekly* (《中国学生周报》) as well as Yao Tuo (姚拓)'s biography (Yao, 2005) and Bai Yao (白堊)'s autobiographical novel (Bai,

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² Since its inception, *Chao Foon* has been published semi-monthly from its inaugural issue to Issue 72 (October 1958), monthly from Issues 73 (November 1958) to 433 (December 1989), then bimonthly from Issue 434 (January 1990) until its defunct at Issue 488 (January/February 1999). Since December 2002, it has been taken over by the MCLC and published as a (semi-)annual publication up to its 515th issue.

³ *The Student Weekly*, founded on 27 July 1956 and edited from 29 August 1958, issue No. 110, was moved from Singapore to No. 13, 201 Road, Camarines, Kuala Lumpur, and was later converted to a monthly newspaper in March 1973, issue No. 866. In early February 1978, issue No. 924 was converted to a semi-monthly newspaper. Issue 1070 is the last issue available today, published on 1 October 1984. In Hong Kong, *The Chinese Students Weekly* was founded on 25 July 1952 and ceased publication on 20 July 1974, with a total of 1,128 issues published in 22 years.

⁴ Southern College was upgraded to the Southern University College (南方大学学院) in 2012.

2006; 2016).

There are many academic studies on *Chao Foon* (Chan, 2001; Lim, 2021a; 2021b; Ng, Fan, Ding, 2011; Ho, 2012; 2015; 2017; Huang 2005⁵; Phoon, 2010; Teoh, 2006; Chong, 2015a; 2015b; 2016; Jin, 2015; Long, 2016; Ng, 2015). Most studies focused on the earlier periods of *Chao Foon* (before and after Malaya's independence in 1957), when modernist works dominated the magazine. Studies on the middle period, from September 1991, edited by Xiao Hei (小黑), Dou La (朵拉), and Lim Choon Bee (林春美), and on the post-revival period, from December 2002 published by the Southern College, are scarce. Due to the long history of *Chao Foon*, there have been few attempts to obtain a full picture of it, and it has only been discussed in sections by period.

Even with the focus on the early period of *Chao Foon*, some aspects were not adequately studied. One of these aspects is the process leading to the publication of *Chao Foon*, specifically, the UPO, which was the big company behind the Chao Foon Press to publish *Chao Foon*.

After the MCLC resumed publishing *Chao Foon*, many leftist realist literary friends and writers, who had originally associated with the MCLC, began to boycott it and stopped inviting people attached to the MCLC to their literary activities⁶. Given the background of how *Chao Foon* was published and the people who published it in 1955, the reactions of left-wing realist literary colleagues and writers might be understandable.

This paper focuses on the UPO and its relationship with the United States' (U.S.) cultural institutions, which represent the interests of the U.S. government, such as the U.S. Information Service and Asia Foundation. It is hoped that *Chao Foon*, published by the MCLC, will be read and appreciated by a wide range of readers, regardless of their political position.

Lim (2021a) states that *Chao Foon* was published by the UPO and founded by intellectuals who came to Hong Kong from mainland China (Lim, 2021a: 1). However, the UPO was not discussed in depth. At the time the article was written, material on the UPO was still lacking. Since the 2010s, several memoirs of people involved in the UPO have been published, such as (Hu Wang, 2010) and (Lo and Hung, 2010; 2014). This study uses these memoirs as its main source of material, to shed light on the UPO.

⁵ Its third chapter was published in *Chao Foon*, in Issue 500.

⁶ This episode was based on my own experience when I was the Deputy Head of the MCLC.

The emergence of *Chao Foon* opened a new trend of modernism in the Chinese-language literary scene in Singapore and Malaya, which was previously dominated by leftist literature. Modernism subsequently swept through the Chinese-language literary scene in Singapore and Malaya. This study questions the coincidence or artificiality of this development⁷.

This paper is divided into three sections. Chapter I sets out the background of those who founded the Union Press (友联出版社) in Hong Kong, a company that later established the UPO in Malaya, what kind of publications the Union Press published and examines how the Union Press was critical of the Communist Party of China (CPC). Chapter II examines how the Union Press established relationships with information and cultural institutions backed by the U.S. government. Chapter III shows how and when the Union Press expanded its activities to Singapore and Malaya and what was discussed in the activities.

I Establishment of Union Press in Hong Kong

1. Background of the Founders of Union Press

The Union Press was under the Union Cultural Organization (友联文化实业有限公司: UCO) which was founded in 1950 by a group of young university students who came to Hong Kong from the mainland China, including Chen Zhuo Sheng, Xu Dong Bin, Shi Cheng Zhi, Maria Yen, Si Ma Chang Feng, Xu Guan San, and Sun Shu Xian (孙述宪). Table 1 shows their backgrounds.

⁷ Choong argues that modernist poetry took hold in Malaya in the 1960s and 1970s, when industrialisation was not yet fully developed and urbanized, which modernism required. Choong argues that it was the discontent of the youth and historical coincidence that led to the modernist new poetry taking root in Malaya in the 1960s and 1970s (Choong, 2009:81-82). Bing Gu (冰谷), who participated in a picnic camp organised by Yao Tuo and Huang Ya, also states that the activities were the attempt to connect young Malayan authors. He further argues that the subject matter of writing was free and not subject to any interference or pressure, and that the *Chao Foon* was a purely literary activity. In contrast, Chong Fah Hing, is critical of the view that it was purely a literary activity or a coincidence of history, based on the fact that Union Press in Hong Kong was supported by the U.S., (Chong, 2015a: 210-213).

Table 1: Founders of UCO in Hong Kong

<p>Chen Zhuo Sheng (陈濯生) alias Chen Si Ming (陈思明), Chen Wei Cang (陈维琯), Xue Luo (薛洛)</p>	<p>Born in Hebei, China. He is the son-in-law of Ding Ting Biao (丁庭標). Chen graduated from the National Central University. He was a member of the Youth Union for Democratic China (民主中國青年大同盟: YUDC) and edited the <i>Free Front</i> (《自由阵线》) in the 1950s before joining the UCO (Lo and Hung, 2014: 11; Yao, 2005: 542). Under the pen name Chen Zheng, he contributed articles to <i>The Student Weekly</i> on topics such as youth development, the history of human rights, and the new society and ideals. He emphasised realism and was vocal in the UPO editorial meetings, but listened quietly to the editorial policies of <i>The Student Weekly</i> and <i>Chao Foon</i>. During the Malaya independence, he joined activities to help people living in the New Villages⁸. After Malaya's independence, while presiding over the UPO, he established the Malaya Press Sdn Bhd (马来亚文化事业有限公司) and published textbooks for the Chinese Schools. He also established the Esquire Kitchen restaurant (大人餐厅). In 1978, he left Kuala Lumpur and moved to the United States (Bai, 2007: 62-64).</p>
<p>Xu Dong Bin (徐东滨) alias Xu Xin Yue (徐心岳)</p>	<p>Born in Hubei, China, he graduated from Peking University. He was the secretary-general, editor-in-chief and president of the Union Press, the director of the Union Research Institute, the chief writer of <i>Ming Pao</i> (《明报》) and <i>Sing Tao Daily</i> (《星岛日报》), and wrote special articles. Additionally, he wrote poems and dramas as Yue Xin (岳心), and essays as Wang Yan Zhi (王延芝). He died in 1995 in the United States, leaving behind literary works such as <i>Guancha Jiayan</i> 《灌茶家言》, <i>Collected Works of Dongbin</i> 《东滨文集》, a novel <i>Pantu</i> 《叛徒》, and <i>Yue Xin Poems Collection</i> 《岳心诗集》 (Yao, 2005: 542). His wife He Feng Ru, (赫凤如) was originally married to Si Ma Chang Feng.</p>
<p>Shi Cheng Zhi (史诚之), alias Shi Cheng Zhi (石诚志)</p>	<p>He was a Military officer and one of the founders of the UCO. He is the author of <i>On the Military Development of the CPC</i> (Shi, 1952), <i>Historical Turning Point and China's Future: On the Past of the People's Liberation Army and the Future of the CPC</i> (Shi, 1972), etc (Lo and Hung, 2014:15).</p>
<p>Maria Yen (燕归来), alias Yan Yun (燕云)</p>	<p>Her real name is Qiu Ran (邱然), she is the daughter of Qiu Chun (邱椿, alias Qiu Da Nian, 邱大年), who was a professor at Peking University, which is where Yen graduated. She was one of the founder of the UCO, the head of the Union Research Institute, and in charge of liaising with the Asia Foundation. She moved to Malaya in the 1950s and briefly taught at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. In 1967 she obtained a doctorate in philosophy in Germany and taught at the University of Zurich in Switzerland. She wrote (Yen, 1952a; 1952b; 1954a; 1954b) (Lo and Hung, 2014: 63).</p>

⁸ New Villages were new settlements for those living in suburban squatters formed during the Emergency, proclaimed in June 1948 following the outbreak of an armed revolt by the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) and ended in July 1960. The British authorities thought that the CPM were supported by the Chinese residents in the suburban squatters. To sever relations between these residents and the CPM, the British relocated the residents of the squatters to new residential areas to tighten control over them.

<p>Si Ma Chang Feng (司马长风), alias Hu Yong Xiang (胡永祥), Hu Ling Yu (胡灵雨), Hu Yue (胡越), Hu Xin Ping (胡欣平), Qiu Zhen Li (秋贞理), Zeng Yong Ye (曾雍也), Fan Peng Tao (范澎湃), Lin Yin (林吟), Luo Qing (罗晴), Gao Jie (高节), and Yan Jing Wen (严静文)</p>	<p>His real name is Hu Ruo Gu (胡若谷). Born in Northeast China, he came to Hong Kong in the late 1940s and was a member of the YUDC. Si Ma Chang Feng was one of the founders of the UCO. He taught at the Hong Kong Shue Yan College (香港樹仁学院) and the Hong Kong Baptist University. He was married twice, first to He Feng Ru and second to Wang Zhuan Ya (王篆雅). Wang Zhuan Ya, under the pseudonym Sheng Zi Juan (盛紫娟), was editor of the literary columns (such as "Sui Hua", 《穗华》) of the <i>Chinese Student Weekly</i> from 1959 to 1964. She published many works by Taiwanese writers, including Si Ma Chang Feng, Qiong Yao (琼瑶), Duan Cai Hua (段彩华), Chu Xi Ning (朱西宁), and Kuo Guo Dong (郭衣洞). She moved to the U.S. with her children in 1969. Si Ma Chang Feng died in 1980 in New York, U.S., after a long illness.</p>
<p>Xu Guan San (许冠三)</p>	<p>His pseudonym is Yu Ping Fan (于平凡). He studied at the Northeastern University (东北大学) and was trained by Xie Cheng Ping (谢澄平), the main director of the Free Press (自由出版社). He was a member of the YUDC. After publishing <i>Every Man's Literature</i> (《人人文学》) in 1952, he focused on his academic work and taught in the Department of History at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (Lo and Hung, 2014: 13).</p>

The UCO's initial source of income came from the salaries of the founders who worked at *Zhong Sheng Bao* (《中声报》), a newspaper agency. *Zhong Sheng Bao* was led by the leading figures of the YUDC's Freedom Press, such as Xie Cheng Ping and Ding Ting Biao, who had already received U.S. aid at the time. Ding Ting Biao was the father-in-law of Chen Zhuo Sheng, one of the UCO founders, which enabled him to use Ding's influence in literary and political circles in Hong Kong (Lo and Hung, 2014:176; 178).

According to *The Union Press* (《友联出版社》), a booklet published in November 1955⁹, the founders fled to Hong Kong after the CPC gained power in China in 1949, to avoid being liquidated by them. Some advocated that they "choose freedom, but with a sense of responsibility and determination to dedicate themselves to the destruction of Communist rule and the establishment of a democratic society in China". Others advocated that they had "carried out youth organisations and cultural work, running two schools, an institute and two magazines". However, regardless of their claims, when they arrived in Hong Kong, they were almost all refugees.

According to *The Union Press*, they opposed the communist regime on mainland China and wanted to "teach Chinese youth in the free world, especially in Southeast Asia, to recognise the truth about communism and communist rule, and to cooperate wholeheartedly with other people in Southeast Asia to counter communist subversive activities" (Law, 2009: 111).

⁹ Images of the front cover and one page of the booklet are published in Lo and Hung (2014:12-13).

The Union Press had three main principles, namely, “political democracy, economic justice and social freedom” (Lo and Hung, 2014:11). To implement these core values, the presidents were chosen through democratic meetings. For security reasons, contact with Americans was kept confidential at the time (Lo and Hung, 2014:11).

The Union Press was a commercial organisation which was actually under the UCO (Lo and Hung, 2014:14). Key figures in the UCO are believed to have been associated with founders of the Union Press, and in the 1960s, with Xi Hui Zhang (奚会璋)¹⁰.

2. Publications of Union Press

In an article “Book Publishing Work of the Union Press” published in the *Catalogue of Books of the Union Press* (《友联出版社图书目录》) in 1964, the Union Press is mentioned as follows:

The Union Press is a cultural publishing institution founded to supply useful reading materials of different natures to society according to the needs of readers of different interests and degrees. We strive to make the Union Press a multifaceted supply of spiritual food and provide the greatest possible cultural service to the vast number of Chinese readers overseas, and to foreign readers everywhere who are interested in learning about Chinese culture and studying Chinese issues (Union Press, 1964: 1).

The catalogue lists seven periodicals published by the Union Press, each with different natures and readerships, as follows:

1. *The China Weekly* 《祖国周刊》: First published in January 1953. A comprehensive publication with a literary, academic, and political focus (Union Press, 1964: 1),

¹⁰ He was born 18 December 1929 in Shenyang (沈阳), but his ancestry can be traced to Dangtu County (当涂县), Anhui Province. When his father, who had completed his PhD at Columbia University, joined the Shanghai Bank, he too moved to Shanghai where he stayed until high school. In 1948, he visited his second daughter, brother-in-law and younger brother in Taiwan and did not return to China. In 1949, he studied in the Faculty of Economics at New Asia College. In 1951, on Qian Mu’s recommendation, together with Yu Ying Shi, he participated in the activities and work of the UCO. After graduation in 1953, he joined the UCO to work full-time. In 1954, he was appointed as the person in charge of the printing of *The Chinese Students Weekly*. Between 1956 to 1959, he worked in Singapore and Malaya as the head of *The Students Weekly*. In 1960, he went to the U.S. to study and in 1963 obtained a master’s degree in business administration and returned to Hong Kong. After returning to Hong Kong, he officially became a liaison of the UCO with the Asia Foundation. In 1967, he moved to the U.S. for family reasons and started new business dealing in toys and gifts (Lo and Hung, 2014: 49-55).

- aimed at intellectuals (Law, 2009: 111). It was intended that this journal become an authoritative journal in the study of the CPC (Union Press, 1964: back cover).
2. *The College Life* 《大学生生活》: This was a semi-monthly journal, first published in April 1955. It was used as an academic and literary supplementary reading for students in higher education institutions.
 3. *The Chinese Students Weekly*: First published on the 25th of July 1952, with an edition published in Hong Kong and a sub-edition published in Burma. It was used as an extra-curricular reading for secondary school students in Hong Kong and Southeast Asia (except Singapore and Malaya).
 4. *The Student Weekly*: First published on the 27th of July 1956. It is an extra-curricular reading for Chinese High School students in Singapore and Malaya.
 5. *The Children's Paradise* 《儿童乐园》: Published from January 1953 to 1994. It is a fortnightly magazine for children's education and learning.
 6. *Union Research Service* 《友联研究通报》: It is a semi-weekly English language magazine that provides a comprehensive coverage of the current situation in the CPC to foreign readers.
 7. *Chao Foon*: This is a purely literary journal published in Malaya (Union Press, 1964: 1).

In addition to these seven periodicals, there was a bi-weekly magazine, *The Teenagers' Paradise* 《少年乐园》, first published on the 15th of March 1964. It was published by the Teenagers' Paradise Company (少年乐园社) in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia, with the Union Press Circulating Company in Singapore as the general agency. Further, it was printed by the Union Printing in Kowloon, Hong Kong and sold at 40 cents in the Malaysian Ringgit. After a suspension, the magazine resumed publication on the 15th of May 1977¹¹ and continued until Issue 107, which was published in November 1981.

The catalogue lists 1,091 titles and 1,213 volumes covering a diverse range of fields, including academic, literary (including eight titles from the *Chao Foon* Literary Series), educational, scientific, entertainment, youth, children's books, current affairs (translated books on communism in China, Russia, and U.S. foreign policy), and Chinese current affairs (a research series on the CPC written in English and Chinese).

The following statement from the article "Book Publishing Work of the Union Press" is worth noting:

We introduce translated books on foreign culture and foreign affairs to Chinese

¹¹ The edition first published in 1977 and all the collection are referenced in the MCLC collection.

readers, as well as foreign language books on Chinese culture and affairs to foreign readers. In doing so, we hope to make a small contribution to the communication between Chinese and Western cultures (Union Press, 1964: 1).

In addition, it was stressed that the existing policy should be maintained with an emphasis on publishing books for young people, children, and literature (Union Press, 1964: 2). Here, the policy refers to three main principles: “political democracy, economic justice, and social freedom” .

He Zhen Ya (何振亚) said in an interview that *The Chinese Student Weekly* was a publication for young people and had no editorial policy, expect that it must be anti-communist. He said that they did not necessarily adhere to the three main principles, as everyone had their own sense of fairness. He also said that “if you open a garden, you should also open personnel affairs” (Lo and Hung, 2014: 20).

Lin Yue Heng (林悦恒)¹², one of the main directors of the UCO, also mentioned in an interview:

The Union Press was a relatively politicised organisation, with democratic politics, fair economy and free culture as the main principals. We felt that education was very important to our work in Hong Kong and we wanted to reach out to different age groups. This is why we published *Children’s Paradise*, *The Chinese Student Weekly*, *The College Life*, and *China Weekly*. We all felt that we had to include different age groups in our readership (Lo and Hung, 2014: 181).

The above shows that the Union Press did not only focus on the three main principles but also anti-communist ideals and the education of people from different age groups through its publications. In the interview, He Zhen Ya stated that anti-communism was an ideological issue. These intentions are in line with what Brayton Wilbur, the first President of the Committee for Free Asia (CFA, the predecessor of the Asia Foundation), said in a letter

¹² Born in Xinhui (新会), Guangdong Province, he moved to Hong Kong in 1949. He studied in Hong Kong until high school and then entered the Department of Philosophy, Taiwan University in 1954. After graduating in 1958, he returned to Hong Kong on the recommendation of his teacher Yin Hai Guang (殷海光) to join the UCO, where he was in charge of organising materials at URI and editing the *China Weekly*. In the early 1960s, he went to Canada to study and returned to Hong Kong in 1964 to work for UCO again. Together with Wen Lau (文楼) and Dai Tien (戴天), and others the Chuang Jian Experimental Institute (創建实验学院) was established. From the 1960s onwards, he was editor-in-chief of *The College Life* and president of *The Chinese Student Weekly* and remains a senior executive of the UCO. He is now settled in the U.S. and travels frequently between mainland China, Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong, where he organises calligraphy exhibitions (Lo and Hung, 2014: 176).

of intent published by the CFA in May 1951. Wilbur was a strong supporter of anti-communist ideology-based individuals and organisations. He stated that no money would be spared to realise the freedom ideology (Cummings, 2011).

In addition to publishing, UCO established the Union Research Institute (友联研究所, URDI), that studied Chinese current affairs. It also had the Union Press (友联图书编译所)¹³, the Union Press Circulation Company (友联书报发行公司), the Union Printing Company with headquarters in Hong Kong. It also had sister companies such as Malaya Book Company (马来亚图书公司) in Kuala Lumpur, Macao Union Press (澳门友联图书公司), and Union Book (友联图书公司) in Hong Kong.

II Financial Aid from the U.S. to the Union Press

1. Relationship with the U.S. Information Service

The U.S. Informational Service commissioned the Union Press to print, distribute and publish books that illustrated the growing power of the Soviet Union and the CPC. As these books were biased towards anti-communist literature, the Union Press was cautious about publishing them by themselves. Therefore, the Union Press published them in their original manuscripts, unaltered, and the U.S. Information Service bought them back in bulk. Later, as Asia Press became involved, their planning and publishing volumes grew, and they became more familiar with the Hong Kong environment; the U.S. Informational Service switched to self-publishing. By injecting money into the Union Press, the U.S. Information Bureau achieved its goal of translating and publishing, while simultaneously spreading resistance to communism, promoting Western liberalism, and moving closer to a Third Force in Hong Kong. The Third Force was a political movement that developed in Hong Kong, oriented towards a third way, different from both the CPC and the Kuomintang (KMT).

Both the U.S. Informational Service and the Asia Foundation were Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) stooges and were funded by the CIA; therefore, their aims were obvious. The Union Press was chosen because of its similar philosophy of trying to curb the spread of the CPC among the younger generation of students. This was done by collecting raw information on the CPC and the KMT, analysing and researching them, and publishing cultural and educational books.

¹³ Published cultural books related to China were books by Tang Jun Yi (唐君毅), Mu Zong San (牟宗三), and Zou Shun Sheng (左舜生) from the New Asia College, as well as the *You Lian Huo Ye Wen Xuan* (友联活叶文选). Through the introduction of Zhang Huai Jie (张丕介), a teacher at the New Asia College, Yu Yong Shi, Li Yong Zhen (黎永振), Xi Hui Zhang, Gu Mei, Sun Shu Yu, and others who had studied at the college came to help out (Lo and Hung, 2014: 182).

2. The Relationship with the Asia Foundation

The Asia Foundation is a private organisation that advances U.S. interests in the Asia-Pacific region. It was created in 1954 from its predecessor, the CFA, established in 1951¹⁴. After the Korean War (25 June 1950 - 27 July 1953), the U.S. wished to gain a better understanding of Far Eastern and Chinese issues and found the work of the URI helpful (Lo and Hung, 2014:181).

The URI was established by the UCO, which collects and publishes research in China. Each day, dozens of personnel were assigned to material with which they were familiar, the material was marked, and articles were clipped, classified, and stored by the archivist (Lo and Hung, 2014: 220). *Index to the Classified Files on Communist China Held by the Union Research Institute*, published in March 1962 by the URI¹⁵, shows that the clipped articles were divided into five categories: general, political and social, military, finance and economy, and culture and education. These articles were so informative that many researchers wishing to study contemporary Chinese issues sought information from the URI.

There are two explanations for the first contact between the UCO and Asia Foundation: First, according to He Zhen Ya, he and Chen Zhuo Sheng had a relationship with Professor He Yi Jun (何义均) of the National Central University (中央大学). He explained that this was because he and Chen Zhuo Sheng were related to Professor He, the head of the KMT parliamentary group at the university (Lo and Hung, 2014: 32). In his review, Guan Ping (

平) offers the following interpretation: Both recollections of the early activities of the Third Force refer to He Yi Jun as an adviser to Clark, the resident officer of the American Embassy in Guangzhou. The membership list published by the YUDC, the earliest organisation of the Third Force, listed He Yi Jun as the head of the political group (Guan, 2014). However, He Zhan Ya never discussed this with He Yi Jun, who was his teacher, and the UCO has never previously explained why it contacted the Asia Foundation through He Yi Jun. Chen Zhuo Sheng studied politics at the National Central University and was related to He Yi Jun; however, this explanation is likely to be an assumption by He Zhen Ya.

Chen Zhuo Sheng's father-in-law is Ding Ting Biao, a key figure in the *Free Front* (《自由阵线》) group. In the early 1950s, the group cooperated with the U.S. to publish the weekly newspaper *Free Front*. Cooperation between the *Free Front* group and the U.S. was further

¹⁴ The website of Asia Foundation states that it was established in 1954. However, Wong Ching (黄静) states that the Asia Foundation was established in June 1950 (Wong, 2002: 20).

¹⁵ There is a Chinese version of this catalogue, titled 《友联研究所分类资料目录》, which is available on the Hong Kong Baptist University's website: <https://library.hkbu.edu.hk/collections/special-collections-archives/contemporary-china-research-collection/ccrc-mf/union-chi/>.

extended to other projects such as the Free Press (自由出版社), *Zhong Sheng Ri Bao* (《中声日报》), and *Zhong Sheng Wan Bao* (《中声晚报》). These projects were aimed at “establishing a cultural centre, developing from a cultural movement to a political movement and then to a military movement, forming a Third Force as a whole, fighting the Communist Party and taking back the country” (Chen, 2011: 49).

Many of the key figures of the first generation of the UCO were also involved in the Third Force political activities in Hong Kong in the 1940s and the 1950s. For example, Chen Zhuo Sheng, Si Ma Chang Feng, and Xu Guan San were editors of *The Independent Critique* (《独立评论》), an important publication of the Third Force, while Xu Dong Ping and Maria Yen were editors of the *Free Front*, a Third Force publication (Guan, 2014)¹⁶.

Bai Yao's autobiographical novel describes how the founders of the Union Press perceived the situation. The novel features characters who appear to be the founders of the Union Press. One character, who appears to be modelled after Chen Zhuo Sheng, tells the following story:

The launch of the UCO and *The Chinese Student Weekly* happened at a time of instability in liberal democracy. It was before the outbreak of the Korean War, and the U.S. had sidelined or abandoned the government of Republic of China in Taiwan. At the time of the CPC's fall of Hainan Island in April 1950, the U.S. had a pro-CPC policy and Secretary of State Acheson was willing to recognise the CPC if it could govern the country, gain the confidence of the people and fulfil its international obligations (Bai, 2016: 148).

The characters, who appear to have been modelled after Shi Cheng Zhi, state that they should sow an early spring to lead the American people against the communists (Bai, 2016: 148).

Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that they were closely associated with each other. However, according to Chen Zheng Mao (陈正茂), a key figure in the *Free Front* group, Xie Cheng Ping had too many enemies, did not trust his old friends, and had no new friends, but set up two organisations, the Independent Democratic Movement (独立民主运动) and the Youth Union for Democratic China. The former included Zhang Guo Tao (张国焘, Fang Tian's father), Huang Yu Ren (黄宇人), Li Wei Chen (李微尘), Sun Bao Gang (孙宝刚), and others. However, they each had their own views and eventually could not agree. The latter was vibrant, with key figures such as Chen Zhuo Sheng, Maria Yen, Xu Dong Bing, Si

¹⁶ Lin Bo Wen states that the third force political movement that emerged with U.S. support was unsuccessful; the only achievements can be seen in the Union Research Institute and Union Press (Lin, 1999: 118).

Ma Chang Feng, and Xu Guan San, who later founded the UCO. However, Xie Cheng Ping realised that they only wanted to borrow money and subsequently terminated the relationships (Chen, 2014). Therefore, it was difficult for Chen Zhuo Sheng and his group to receive U.S. assistance through the *Free Front* group.

The second explanation, as mentioned in Xi Hui Zhang's interview, is that Maria Yen was introduced to James Taylor Ivy (Jimmy Ivy), the first president of the Asia Foundation, through her father's old friend Gui Zhong Shu (桂中枢). Ivy had a good impression of Maria Yen and admired the ideals and hard work of the young people who came together in the UCO. In addition, as the UCO was strictly self-managed, Ivy never interfered with or criticised the UCO budgets, plans, or annual reports (Lo and Hung, 2014: 25-30; 65-66). Ivy served on the CFA from 1951 to 1952, the forerunner of the Asia Foundation, which aimed to provide a direct communication channel with the people of Asian countries. It aimed to curb the spread of communist ideas among the youth and foster a pro-European and an anti-communist consciousness in Asian countries (Cummings, 2011).

Maria Yen visited Qian Mu (钱穆), an old friend of her father Qiu Chun, at the New Asia College (新亚书院) in 1951 and asked him to introduce her to the outstanding students. This led to students such as Yu Ying Shi (余英时)¹⁷, who later became the first editor-in-chief of *The Chinese Student Weekly*, and Xi Hui Zhang, who was studying at the Faculty of Economics, to join the UCO. Xi Hui Zhang was involved in student activities, such as choir and drama groups. One of the talents he discovered was Bai Yao, who was still studying at Pui Ching Middle School (培正中学). Gu Mei (古梅), Sun Shu Yu (孫述宇), and Wang Jian Wu (王建武) from the New Asia College also joined the UCO.

Ivy, while at the Ford Foundation between 1953 and 1954, granted USD 200,000 to New Asia College through Yale-in-China. With this fund, New Asia College built a new campus on Farm Road, To Kwa Wan, Kowloon, in 1956. The relationship between the U.S. supported New Asia College and the UCO members was also close (Lo and Hung, 2014: 54). When Ivy oversaw the Asia Foundation from 1954 to 1959, he was closely associated with Maria and New Asia College. This is likely why the UCO was supported by the Asia Foundation. This is consistent with Lin Yue Heng's assertion that the UCO received U.S. assistance through the Asia Foundation after the Korean War. Thus, the second theory is

¹⁷ Also known by the pseudonym Ai Qun (艾群), he studied under Qian Mu at the New Asia College in Hong Kong in 1950 and was one of the first graduates of the university in 1952. He graduated from Yen Ching University. In the early 1950s, while living in Hong Kong, he was the first (but short-lived) editor-in-chief of *The Chinese Student Weekly*. His publications include *Shi Xue Yu Chuan Tong* (《史学与传统》), *You Ji Feng Chui Shui Shang Lin: Qian Mu Yu Xian Dai Zhong Guo Xue Shu* (《犹记风吹水上鳞——钱穆与现代中国学术》), and *Ren Wen Yu Min Zhu* (《人文与民主》). In 1974, he was elected a member of the Academia Sinica (台湾中央研究院) in Taiwan (Lo and Hung, 2014: 54).

more convincing.

In addition to Maria Yen, Chen Zhuo Sheng, and Xu Dong Bing; Xi Hui Zhang later had direct contact with the Asia Foundation (Lo and Hung, 2014: 68). The Asia Foundation funded all the UCO's publications. This included publications from *The Chinese Student Weekly*, *Children's Paradise*, *College Life*, *China Weekly* and, URI (Lo and Hung, 2014: 25).

Lin Yue Heng, who became a key figure in the UCO, recognised that the Asia Foundation was supporting the activities of the UCO and not the UCO itself. He acknowledged that the Asia Foundation's financial support to the UCO was only provided to the URI, the publication of *The College Life*, and the activities of *The Chinese Student Weekly* (essay contests, anniversary activities, literary society activities, communication activities, and events such as summer and winter camps), and not to Union Press (Lo and Hung, 2014: 188).

However, there are some discrepancies between the two testimonies. It is possible that they received funding at different times. In any event, He Zhen Ya and Lin Yue Heng had no direct contact with the Asia Foundation. Xi Hu Zhang, who later had direct contact with the Asia Foundation, stated that he submitted financial reports to the foundation. The UCO had a printing press and distribution network, but most of it was funded by the Asia Foundation (Lo and Hung, 2014: 66).

In 1967, U.S. media revealed that the CIA sponsored several institutions, including the Asia Foundation, which led to the suspension of its activities. The Asia Foundation subsequently resumed its activities, but changed its aims from "build democratic institutions, encourage the development of democratic leaders" to the development of Asia as a whole. In an interview, Xi Hui Zhang stated that a member of the UCO stumbled across an article revealing the links between the Asia Foundation and the CIA. They found this offensive, as receiving an Asia Foundation grant meant working for the intelligence agency. As a result, some of the Asia Foundation staff quit, leading the Asia Foundation to change its policy of obtaining financial resources from Shell Oil and other sources (Lo and Hung, 2014: 67). Interestingly, Maria Yen and Xi Hui Zhang, two key figures at the UCO who were in direct contact with the Asia Foundation, left the UCO in 1967 and moved abroad.

In the 1970s, the Asia Foundation stopped supporting *The Chinese Student Weekly*. Instead, it allocated funds to establish a printing press (plant and equipment) in the hope that the Union Press would become self-sustaining. At the time, the Union Press did not perform well in textbook publishing in Hong Kong but performed relatively well in Malaysia.

Xi Hui Zhang recognised that the UCO was not set up to serve the U.S., but rather for its own ideals and aspirations (Lo and Hung, 2014: 66). Lin Yue Heng also recognised that the UCO did not follow U.S. culture but instead was a group of people with their own shared ideals and culture. The Asia Foundation was now interested in some of its activities and

proposed cooperation (Lo and Hung, 2014: 188). However, as long as it received funding from the CIA through the Asia Foundation and U.S. Information Service, it was on the CIA's terms, whether intentionally or unintentionally. The CIA took advantage of the UCO's anti-communist ideals to collect materials on the CPC to publish and educate the younger generation away from the Communist Party and towards the West. It cannot be attributed to mere "historical coincidence" that the initial ambitions of the founders of UCO coincided with what the CIA was trying to do.

III The Launch of *The Student Weekly* and *Chao Foon* in Singapore and Malaya

1. The UCO's Expansion into Singapore and Malaya

How did the UCO in Hong Kong come to operate in Singapore and Malaya? He Zhen Ya recalled that in the mid-1950s, when the CPM was still active, Leong Yew Koh (梁宇皋), through his Hong Kong contacts, found people in Hong Kong to take on cultural and propaganda activities, which led him to He Zhan Ya. First, he went to Malaya alone, and later, additional personnel were sent from Hong Kong to start the first edition of the student newspaper (Lo and Hung, 2014:21–22). Leong Yew Koh was one of the founders of the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) and held key positions in the MCA, including Secretary General, and was also a cabinet minister in the government of the Federation of Malaya.

According to Xi Hui Zhang, the UCO decided to establish operations in Singapore and Malaysia in 1956 (Lo and Hung, 2014: 60). However, since *Chao Foon* was launched in 1955, the timing of the decision needed to be examined. Yu De Kuan (余德宽)¹⁸, Chen Zhuo Sheng, Maria Yen, and Xi Hui Zhang from the UCO in Hong Kong arrived in Singapore as an introductory party, followed by Wang Jian Wu, Zhan Hai Wei, Yao Tian Ping, Gu Mei, Huang Ya, and Li Yong Zhen. Almost all the key figures from the UCO came to Singapore and Malaya to publish *The Student Weekly*, *Chao Foon*, and Chinese textbooks and open bookshops (Lo and Hung, 2014: 60).

¹⁸ Born in 1922, after graduating from Fu Ren Catholic University in Beijing (北京辅仁大学), he moved to Hong Kong and worked as an editor of the *Zhong Sheng Bao*. He started the publication of *The Chinese Students Weekly* in 1952. He supervised the printing of the journal in its earlier period (from 25 July 1952 to 3 December 1954, 124 issues altogether). He moved to Singapore around 1954 to develop the UPO business, where he launched *The Student Weekly* and *Chao Foon*. Under the pen name Shen Qing (申青), he wrote editorials for *The Chinese Student Weekly* and *The Student Weekly*. He also wrote editorials under the pseudonyms Yu Zhi Yang (于之洋) and Su Geng Sheng (苏更生). He was the first president and first editor-in-chief of UPO (Yao, 2005: 529-532; Lo and Hung, 2014: 18).

2. Reaching out to the Youth: Camping Activities

The UPO established *The Student Weekly* outposts throughout Singapore and Malaya, from which talented high school students were recruited as correspondents. Additionally, the UPO organised choirs, theatre troupes, and literary creation activities, as it did in Hong Kong. It also organised promotional activities to proclaim democratic ideas and maintain Chinese culture (Lo and Hung, 2014: 60).

The UPO created camps aimed at developing young leaders (Lo and Hung, 2014: 58). Bai Yao wrote about the camp in his autobiographical novel as follows:

The first camp was held in the Cameron Highlands in August 1956, attended by members of the UPO, such as Maria Yen, Xi Hui Zhang, Chen Zhuo Sheng, and Shi Cheng Zhi; and writers such as Lu Man, Zhang Gong, Liu Bai Song, and Huang Zhi Lian (Bai, 2007: 37).

After Malaya's independence, the third camp was also held in the Cameron Highlands in December 1957. The camp invited Tian Niao (田鸣恩), Xie Bing Ying (谢冰莹), Zhao Er Xian (赵尔谦), Gui Cheng Ping (桂承平), Chen Zhuo Sheng, and Yu De Kuan to discuss new poems published in *Chao Foon*. The camp proceeded as Maria Yen had envisaged, with space for everyone to breathe freely when talking about culture, and for everyone to weave dreams when talking about life (Bai, 2016: 169).

In 1958, Maria Yen, Yu De Kuan, and Chen Zhuo Sheng attended the fourth living camp in Malacca and gave speeches (Bai, 2007: 49; 2016, 169). Bai Yao described that the speeches and talks by Maria Yen, Shi Cheng Zhi, and Xi Hui Zhang were all about the three main principles of the UPO and sowed the seeds of free culture.

Xi Hui Zhang's speech included the following: *Chao Foon*, a pure literary magazine promoting Malayanisation, launched by the UPO in 1955. Further he described it as a literary clearinghouse that rejects political pollution and outlined that the Singapore and Malayan editions of *The Chinese Student Weekly* have roots in the region and are printed and published in Singapore and Malaya under the name *The Student Weekly*. The magazine was aimed at the Malayanisation and set up correspondence clubs from villages to cities to develop youth cultural activities and spread the cause of free culture. The correspondents were all recent high school graduates or still in high school and lacked life experience and a good foundation of knowledge. However, they all shared the common mindset of sowing the seeds of free culture. No matter how limited their strength, they contributed significantly. No matter how bad the environment was, they continue to struggle (Bai, 2016: 104).

Maria Yen's speech was described as follows: The concept behind running living camps was to support the correspondents and readers. They are often unreasonably harassed by extreme leftists at school for "depriving the masses". It is hoped that the

correspondents and readers will establish and transmit themselves firmly through intensive interactions in the life camps (Bai, 2016: 100).

Bai hopes that the debates at the life camps will highlight the positive significance of the life camps and help them to further the ideals of free culture on the youth campus and in the real world (Bai, 2016: 156).

When asked about *The Student Weekly* being anti-communist in the context of the Cold War between East and West, Shi Cheng Zhi fired back that “it is a false proposition and a misleading term” and said “They are rightly anti-communist, anti-communist against Chinese culture, anti-communist against free life. If Europe or the USA were to become a communist country, they would still be rightly anti-communist, anti-Russian, anti-European, and anti-American” (Bai, 2016: 149).

From these examples, it can be seen that they are based on the three main principles, emphasising anti-communism and spreading the seeds of freedom, which coincidentally is the opposite of left-wing literature. Both desperately defend each other's turf, rejecting political contamination with their liberal consciousness and proving themselves to be the clean streams of literature.

Conclusion

UCO, which launched *Chao Foon*, was founded in Hong Kong in 1950. The founders were young intellectuals who came to Hong Kong from mainland China, many of whom were critical of the communist regime in mainland China. The UCO aimed to oppose the communist regime in mainland China and make a free world for young Chinese people, especially in Southeast Asia. Further, the UCO aimed to make people aware of the truth about communist rule and work with the people of Southeast Asia to oppose communism. To reach out to all age groups, UCO launched magazines for different generations, such as children, students, and adults.

The UCO had close ties with the U.S. Information Service and the Asia Foundation agencies representing the interests of the U.S. government. James Taylor Ivy, the first president of the Asia Foundation, provided financial aid for the publishing projects of the Union Press. These U.S. institutions turned to the Union Press because of its high regard for URI, which was established by the UCO to collect and organise primary sources, such as newspaper articles on Chinese affairs. These materials provide essential information to researchers and observers of Chinese affairs. The founders of the UCO recruited personnel at New Asia College, which received a grant from the Ford Foundation, while James Ivy was there.

The background to UCO coming to Malaya was due to the needs of the people in

Malaya. With the threat of the CPM lingering in Malaya, the MCA's Leong Yew Koh sought people in Hong Kong to engage in cultural and propaganda activities. This led him to He Zhen Ya from the UCO. Almost all the key figures of the UCO came to Malaya from Hong Kong. They published *The Student Weekly* and *Chao Foon* and expanded it to textbook publishing and bookshop businesses. UPO set up sales outlets for *The Student Weekly* throughout Malaya and organised cultural activities and camps for high school students and others. UPO used cultural activities as a cover to “educate” Malayan youth to prevent the spread of the CPC and CPM influence among Malayan youth.

Modernism began to emerge in *Chao Foon*, transforming the Chinese-language literary scene in Singapore and Malaya, where leftist literature was strong. This led to *Chao Foon* occupying an important position in Chinese-language literature in Singapore and Malaya. During *Chao Foon*'s rise to such a position, it will be necessary to scrutinise whether the political agenda of the UPO can be seen in the articles and works published in *Chao Foon*.

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