

Correspondence

To the Editorial Board

I would like to reply to, with a view to correcting, your reviewer's remarks on my book, *The Overseas Chinese and the 1911 Revolution: With Special Reference to Singapore and Malaya* (Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1976) in *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* IX, no. 1 (March 1978), 139–40.

Perhaps of minor importance is the fact that my book is the first full-length treatment of the subject. Of course, as your reviewer says, it is true that Professor Wang Gungwu was the first to study Chinese revolutionary activities in the Straits Settlements in his unpublished B.A. History Honours thesis for the University of Malaya, entitled "Chinese Reformists and Revolutionaries in the Straits Settlements, 1900–1911". However, he wrote about "revolutionaries" not "revolutionists" (your reviewer's term) and completed his work in 1953 not 1963. Moreover, it is misleading to say that the field was "further explored by Madam Chen Mong Hock in *The Early Chinese Newspapers of Singapore, 1881–1912*", when in fact her work could hardly claim to have a great deal to do with the Chinese revolutionary movement in Singapore and Malaya. Although it contains a chapter on polemics between *The Union Times* and the *Chong Shing Yit Pao*, entitled "The Battle of Pens", it is discussed generally in the context of Chinese journalism, rather than as part of the ideological disputes between the reformists and the revolutionaries in the region.

More serious — especially as your reviewer devotes so much space to the point — is his charge that I erred in my estimate of the support the revolutionaries had in Singapore and Malaya during the period 1906 to October 1911. He writes: "Dr. Yen estimates, on unsolid ground, that the number of revolutionary supporters in Singapore and Malaya between 1906 and October 1911 might stand at 30,000 to 41,000 which accounted for about 4.4 to 5.9 per cent of the Chinese population over the age of 15 in Singapore and Malaya." This is a misreading of my estimate. In fact, what he has quoted is the estimate for the four months from the outbreak of the Wuchang Uprising on 10 October 1911 to the abdication of the Manchu emperor on 12 February 1912 (p. 264, para. 1). I have made it quite clear in the chapter that the estimated revolutionary supporters in the period between 1906 and October 1911 was somewhere between 2,000 to 3,500 (p. 263, para. 2), representing only 0.3 to 0.5 per cent of the Chinese population over the age of 15 in Singapore and Malaya.

With regard to my claim that the Chinese revolutionary movement helped to promote unity among the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya (pp. 287–89), I stand firm by that claim, for in the work I have presented evidence to establish this point. Moreover, at no point do I claim, as your reviewer says, that "Chinese society in the region has since been built on a basis of solidarity".

Finally, it is distressing to find that your reviewer, Mr. Chui Kwei-chiang, should not give my book more care and attention, and especially fail to give the readers a clear overall evaluation of its worth as a contribution to the history of the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya, and as a study of the overseas Chinese role in the 1911 Revolution.

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