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Reception of Hong Kong's *Modern Children* magazine (1946–1951) in Malaya through the lens of intercultural and transcultural communication

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Established in 1941, *Modern Children* was the first children's Chinese literary magazine in Hong Kong. Apart from its main markets in Hong Kong and mainland China, *Modern Children* had readers in Malaya, Macau, Vietnam, and even the United States. This study aims to explore the reception of *Modern Children* in Malaya, which was the largest overseas market of the magazine, and the mutual cultural influences between Hong Kong and Malaya in the context of children's literary magazine through the lens of intercultural and transcultural communication theories in cultural discourse studies. By scrutinising Chinese Malayan children's participation in *Modern Children* during 1946–1951, this study reveals the reception of the magazine in Malaya. The magazine facilitated intercultural and transcultural communication among Chinese children in Hong Kong, Malaya, and other regions, serving as a platform for cultural exchange and allowing reader-editor and reader-reader interactions. Moreover, *Modern Children* played a role in shaping moral values of Chinese Malayan children and influencing the development of local Chinese Malayan children's magazines. Overall, this study presents complex dynamics between Hong Kong and Malaya in the context of children's literary publication, shedding light on the significance of children's literature as a vehicle for cross-border communication and understanding.

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Introduction

Hong Kong, a British colony during 1842–1997, was viewed as a “cultural desert” before the 1940s (Hou 2009, p. 29). However, with “south-coming intellectuals” (Yung 2022, p. 137) fleeing to Hong Kong from mainland China to escape from Japanese invasion since 1937, the literary circle in this British colony began to flourish in the late 1930s and the 1940s. As a result, in June 1941, Hong Kong witnessed the establishment of its first children’s literary magazine, *Modern Children* (新兒童), which was published bi-weekly by Tsang Chiu-sam 曾昭森 (1901–1975) and Huang Ching-yuen 黃慶雲 (1920–2018) (Leung 2010). During 1942–1945, the magazine moved to mainland China as Hong Kong was occupied by the Japanese. Due to inflation and instability in wartime, the magazine’s price rose from five yuan to eighty yuan in this period. In late 1945, *Modern Children* returned to Hong Kong, and its price during 1946–1949 was one Hong Kong dollar. Such amount could purchase 1.5 kg of top-grade rice or 300 g of beef in 1947, according to the data published in “Hong Kong Memory” project (Hong Kong Memory 2012). Therefore, the price of *Modern Children* seemed to be quite high but there were schools and organisations that subscribed to the magazine so that the less affluent children could share access to this magazine (Leung 2010). In 1941, an advertisement stated that *Modern Children* had a circulation of 5,000 every issue (Modern Children 1941). In 1948, the circulation of *Modern Children* was reported to be around 10,000 (Modern Children 1948e). Readers of this bi-weekly magazine spread across Hong Kong, mainland China, Macau, Malaya, Vietnam, and even the United States (Leung 2010). The popularity of this locally established magazine was unprecedented in Hong Kong literary history.

Readers in Malaya constituted the greatest population of the magazine’s overseas readers. There was a historical reason that contributed to the popularity of children’s Chinese literary magazines in Malaya, especially in Chinese Malayan schools. A great number of Chinese people had migrated to Malaya to make a living and look for more business opportunities since 1819, forming a relatively large overseas Chinese community in Malaya (Wong 2002). According to Purcell (1956), the Chinese accounted for thirty-five per cent of the population of Malaya in 1911. The percentage of the Chinese increased to forty-three per cent in 1941 while the Malays accounted for forty-one per cent of the population. As such, the Chinese were the largest ethnic group in the population of Malaya in the 1940s. The early Chinese immigrants into Malaya were mainly merchants, farmers, and fishermen with low education level but since the late nineteenth century, more Chinese intellectuals or educated Chinese migrated to Malaya who identified with China instead of Malaya and regarded China as their roots, and thus were enthusiastic about the Chinese literary movements in mainland China (Wong 2002; Li 2014). Therefore, Chinese schools in Malaya highly valued education about Chinese language, literature, and ideologies (Wong 2002), and likely had a positive reception towards Chinese literary magazines for children.

Since the late nineteenth century, Chinese culture had dominated Chinese Malayan literature and the education of Chinese Malayan children (Wong 2002). However, in the 1940s, there were very few Chinese children’s magazines that were suitable for Chinese Malayan children to read (Cao 2014; Fok 2014). After the Second World War (WWII), the first local children’s literary magazines in Malaya emerged, including *Young Malayan* (馬來亞少年) and *World Children* (世界兒童), the former being established in 1946 and the latter in 1950 (Lim 2016; Xu 2016b). Nevertheless, before the 1950s, Malaya still relied much on the imports of children magazines from regions such as Shanghai and Hong Kong (Xu 2016a). Therefore, *Modern Children* from Hong Kong also had its market in Malaya.

What was the reception of *Modern Children* in Malaya? What literary and cultural influences did this magazine bring to Malaya, which is geographically distant from Hong Kong, and vice versa? This study aims to address these previously unexplored questions to illuminate the cultural exchange and dynamics between Hong Kong and Chinese Malayan children in the 1940s. By doing so, it seeks to underscore the significant role of *Modern Children* and Hong Kong in shaping the landscape of Asian literary history during this period.

The past issues of *Modern Children* between 1942 and 1949 have been well-preserved and digitised by the Chinese University of Hong Kong and Shanghai Library. Following the relocation of the magazine’s editorial office from Hong Kong to mainland China in 1949, a significant portion of the issues published in mainland China were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) (Chan 1996), rendering the issues after no. 173 (published on January 1, 1951) inaccessible for scholarly examination. Consequently, the present study concentrates on the period spanning from 1941 to 1951. However, subsequent research conducted by this study has revealed an apparent absence of documented participation from Chinese Malayan children in the magazine prior to the conclusion of WWII. As a result, the time frame pertinent to this study is narrowed down to the years 1946–1951.

Intercultural and transcultural communication theories

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural dynamics between Hong Kong and Malaya during the publication of *Modern Children* magazine, this study borrows the concepts from cultural discourse studies to discuss the cultural interaction between Hong Kong and Malaya in the context of the magazine. According to Feng and Wang (2024), the term “intercultural communication” focuses on the interactions or communicative practices between people from different cultures, “such as face-to-face interactions between participants from different cultural backgrounds and media discourse targeted at audiences from another culture” (p. 252), while transcultural communication “investigates the convergence, synergy, hybridisation, inner heterogeneity, etc. of cultures in the globalised world” (p. 252). In other words, the concept of intercultural communication highlights the interactions between the participants and the meeting of different cultures, for example, business meeting, people watching foreign films, and overseas advertising (Feng and Wang 2024). On the other hand, transcultural communication foregrounds the hybridisation and mixture of different cultures. An example is Moutai coffee launched by Luckin Coffee in 2023 (Wang and Toh 2023). This innovative drink combines Moutai, a Chinese national liquor deeply rooted in the country’s cultural heritage, with coffee, a beverage that has become a global symbol of Western culture and lifestyle. This deliberate merging of Chinese and Western cultural components in a single product reflects globalisation and cultural exchange.

Under the context of *Modern Children*, this study aims to analyse the complex dynamics between Hong Kong and Chinese Malayan readers from the lens of intercultural and transcultural communication theories. From an intercultural communication perspective, this paper investigates how *Modern Children* facilitated the flow of information, ideas, and cultural knowledge between Hong Kong and Chinese Malayan readers. From a transcultural communication perspective, the current study aims to examine how the magazine contributed to the hybridisation of Hong Kong and Malayan cultures. By examining the content and reception of this publication, we can gain valuable insights into how interaction and hybridisation occurred between these two regions.

Interactive nature of *Modern Children*

Since its inception in Hong Kong in June 1941, *Modern Children* had consistently maintained an interactive nature, incorporating numerous sections that actively encouraged the participation of its young readership. One such section, entitled “Yun Zi Zi’s Mailbox” (雲姊姊的信箱, a literal translation is “elder sister Yun’s mailbox”), provided a platform for children to engage in correspondence with the magazine’s editor-in-chief, Huang Ching-yuen. This feature afforded the young readers an opportunity to intimately interact with Huang, facilitating the exchange of anecdotes from their daily lives and posing inquiries primarily focused on scientific and societal matters, thereby satisfying their curiosity about the world. Embracing her sisterly role, Huang crafted responses to the children’s letters and selected the interesting and meaningful ones for publication.

On the other hand, to foster children’s interest in writing and to increase their awareness of the happenings in their neighbourhoods, *Modern Children* had invited young readers to be junior reporters (通訊員) for the magazine since 1942. According to its recruitment announcement published in 1942, readers at the age of fourteen or below were welcomed to register as junior reporters, who would receive a certificate and were encouraged to write articles about children’s activities and news in their hometowns and send to the editorial office (*Modern Children* 1942). In 1946, the requirements were revised, and junior reporters should be at the age of between nine and fifteen (*Modern Children* 1946). Other sections in the magazine including stories, art works, comic strips, and riddles were also heavily contributed by young readers.

Apart from the communication between young readers and the magazine, rich and vibrant interaction emerged among the readers themselves, fostering a sense of community and creating opportunities for connection and collaboration. One significant manifestation of reader-to-reader interaction was the formation of readers’ clubs and the organisation of gatherings. According to the search within the magazine by this study, the first readers’ club was formed by young readers in Wuzhou, Guangxi Province on May 25, 1947 (Xie 1947). Shortly after this, readers’ clubs in Hong Kong and Guangzhou were both set up on June 1, 1947, which was also the sixth anniversary of the magazine (*Modern Children* 1947c; Yu 1947). Subsequently, Hunan, Macau, and Nanchang witnessed the establishment of *Modern Children* readers’ clubs in 1947 and 1948 (Li 1947; *Modern Children* 1948b; Wu 1948). Activities in their meetings included book exchange, storytelling, tea parties, dancing performances, outings, sports competitions, etc. (Li 1947; Xie 1947; Zhou 1947; *Modern Children* 1948b). Readers’ clubs served as platforms for like-minded young readers to come together and strengthen their bonds.

Moreover, the spirit of altruism and solidarity among young readers was evident in their voluntary efforts to subscribe to the magazines for others. Some readers selflessly took on the responsibility of ensuring that their peers who may not have had access to the magazines could also benefit from the enriching content. In 1947, three young readers from Hong Kong and mainland China first initiated voluntary subscription to the magazine for underprivileged children (*Modern Children* 1947b). Voluntary subscription means that the readers subscribed to extra issues of the magazine, which were delivered to the underprivileged children. They could either designate the beneficiaries themselves or let the editorial office decide. This beneficent act was then encouraged by the magazine and followed by other readers. The editorial office would post the addresses of the benefactors and the beneficiaries in a section of the magazine so that they could have direct contact with each other.

The magazine also published the addresses and personal information of junior reporters to provide a means for readers to establish direct contact with one another, creating opportunities for personal connections and intellectual exchanges beyond the pages of the publication. By transcending the boundaries of the magazine, this approach to connectivity nurtured a supportive network among young readers, allowing them to expand their social circles and engage in meaningful dialogue with like-minded peers.

Apart from reader-reader social activities outside the magazine, collaborative writing emerged as another form of interaction among the readers. There was a section for collective writing, in which the magazine provided an initial part of a story and asked readers to submit their original continuations of the narrative. The magazine then selected the best ones to publish and invited readers to further develop the story. The publication not only showcased the creative talents of its readers but also cultivated a sense of community and shared authorship.

The various ways for readers to engage with the magazine and their peers illustrate the efforts of *Modern Children* to build an “imagined community” (Anderson 2006). According to Anderson (2006)’s concept, a community is imagined because the members “will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (p. 6). Moreover, the community is “conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (Anderson 2006, p. 7). In the case of *Modern Children*, although a lot of its readers would never know or physically meet other fellow readers, they were brought together through the medium of a children’s literary magazine. By encouraging the active participation from children living in various areas and demonstrating different aspects of children’s lives, the magazine helped the readers construct an image of their communion. A kind of comradeship also existed in the community as the readers tried to help each other in difficult situations as demonstrated by voluntary subscriptions for other children.

As the readers of *Modern Children* formed an imagined community, their dynamic participation in and contribution to such an imagined community suggests that an examination of these participatory channels may yield a wealth of nuanced insights pertaining to the reception and impacts of *Modern Children* within the sociocultural context of Malaya at that time, as well as the influences of Malayan culture on *Modern Children*. Unearthing valuable information from the first-hand archival materials of *Modern Children*, this study explores Chinese Malayan children’s involvement as junior reporters and contributors of the magazine. The term “Chinese Malayan children” in this paper refers to the children of Chinese race living in Malaya. By discussing other children’s magazines published in Malaya locally, the current study also explores the impacts of *Modern Children* on Malayan culture.

Reception of *Modern Children* in Malaya

“Yun Zi Zi’s Mailbox”. Yun Zi Zi 雲姊姊 (literally elder sister Yun), the nickname of the magazine’s editor-in-chief Huang Ching-yuen, was popular among young readers of the publication. “Yun Zi Zi’s Mailbox” received letters written by children from various places who shared with Huang details of their lives and asked challenging questions about science, their personal lives and society that they could not solve by themselves. Huang addressed their queries and published the interesting ones in this section. Based on the currently available data, there were ten letters from nine Chinese Malayan children published in *Modern Children*’s correspondence section (see Table 1).

Table 1 Summary of Chinese Malayan children's letters to "Yun Zi Zi's Mailbox".					
Name	Issue no.	Gender	Age	Malayan region	Topic of the letter
Du Shuiyuan 杜水源	No. 92 (June 1, 1947)	Male	15	Perak	Science, origin of the name of China (Du 1947b)
	No. 132 (February 1, 1949)		17		Science (Du 1949)
Lin Qingxuan 林慶誼	No. 98 (September 1, 1947)	Male	15	North Borneo	Seeking solutions to life hardship (Lin 1947)
Zhou Yurong 周玉容	No. 117 (June 16, 1948)	Female	13	Perak	Science (Zhou 1948)
Zhou Nanxing 周南興	No. 131 (January 16, 1949)	Male	16	Perak	Seeking solutions to his poor memory (Zhou 1949)
Ji Zhiyun 季芝韻	No. 138 (May 1, 1949)	Unknown	Unknown	Perak	Science (Ji 1949)
Luo Bingyuan 羅炳源	No. 138 (May 1, 1949)	Male	Unknown	Singapore	Science (Luo 1949)
Huang Fuchuan 黃福傳	No. 147 (September 16, 1949)	Male	Unknown	North Borneo	Questions about <i>Modern Children</i> magazine, social inequality (Huang 1949)
Wu Ming 吳明	No. 151 (November 16, 1949)	Female	Unknown	Nanyang	Science (Wu 1949)
Zhang Yingyong 張英勇	No. 154 (January 1, 1950)	Male	Unknown	Singapore	Science (Zhang 1950)

"Nanyang" is a general term referring to Southeast Asia (Cao 2014). The exact region is unknown.

“Yun Zi Zi’s Mailbox” offered an opportunity for direct communication, and thus intercultural communication, between Hong Kong editor and Chinese Malayan young readers. Those Chinese Malayan readers who sent letters to Huang were mainly interested in scientific questions, for example, where the air comes from, why the moon affects tides, why people can keep their balance on a bicycle, and why heavy clouds are dark and rain transparent. The children’s primary focus on scientific knowledge might indicate the lack of education about such knowledge at schools. According to Wong (2002), “in traditional Chinese-stream schools, ... The subject of Chinese literature was also given special emphasis because it provided a central source of moral education.” (p. 37). As Chinese schools put great emphasis on the education of Chinese literature, there could be relatively lower emphasis on science, leading to children’s resort to the correspondence column for answers.

On the other hand, Lin Qingxuan and Zhou Nanxing confided their personal struggles to Huang, seeking guidance and support. Lin disclosed that financial hardship had forced him to discontinue his education, leaving him disoriented and apprehensive about his future prospects (Lin 1947). In response, Huang counselled him that despite his inability to attend school, he could persist in acquiring knowledge through reading and practical experience gained from his occupation. Zhou talked about his trouble of poor memory, often forgetting the tasks that other people asked him to do (Zhou 1949). Huang recommended that Zhou cultivate a stronger sense of responsibility and adopt the practice of writing down important information to avoid forgetting.

These Chinese Malayan children were willing to share their personal struggles with Huang and ask questions out of their curiosity about the world, regarding Yun Zi Zi as an intimate friend and a kind sister. “Yun Zi Zi’s Mailbox” not only provided scientific knowledge to children but also demonstrated a deep understanding and compassion for the challenges they faced in their daily lives and showcased its ability to connect with readers on an emotional level. The mailbox section facilitated intercultural communication, fostering friendship between *Modern Children* and Chinese Malayan children and encouraging the dissemination of knowledge among young readers.

Among the nine writers whose letters were published, only three of them were female. Lower participation of girls, also corroborated by the finding of much fewer female junior reporters than male in the next section, might reflect a lower accessibility of reading or learning materials for girls in Malaya. Chinese society is deeply influenced by Confucian values, which emphasise distinct gender roles and hierarchies (Sung and Pascall 2014). Women would belong to families-in-law after married and were often excluded from formal education while men were the

breadwinners and carriers of the family lineage (Sung and Pascall 2014). As a result, in traditional Chinese families, resources were preferentially allocated to boys. The relatively lower participation of girls in *Modern Children* indicates that these traditional gender norms and inequalities existed in diasporic Chinese communities.

However, a limitation of the analysis is that only the letters published in the magazine could be studied. A large number of letters did not have the opportunity for publication because Huang received too many letters, but she would answer privately (Huang 1943, 1947). There is insufficient information to explore whether these children engaged in further dialogue with Huang, but some of them participated in other activities related to the magazine. For example, Du Shuiyuan, Zhou Yurong, and Zhou Nanxing were the junior reporters of *Modern Children*. Du Shuiyuan had his article depicting a poor child published in December 1947 (Du 1947a). Zhou Yurong actively promoted *Modern Children* to her friends as she secured five new subscriptions to the magazine (Modern Children 1948c). Therefore, some of these children continued to be actively involved in the magazine.

Junior reporters of *Modern Children* in Malaya. Based on the currently available data, among the 1200 junior reporters of *Modern Children*, twenty-eight of them were from Malaya. Table 2 presents the demographics about them and a summary of the articles they wrote.

A majority of the Chinese Malayan junior reporters were male, aged thirteen to fifteen. Most of them came from Perak and Singapore, with the rest scattering across Malaya (see Fig. 1). The presence of junior reporters in other parts of Malaya, albeit in smaller numbers, further reinforces the argument that the publication had a far-reaching impact and resonated with young readers across the region. If counting the number of all Chinese Malayan readers that could be identified, there were fifty Chinese Malayan readers who participated in the various sections of the magazine, including the correspondence section, junior reporters, readers’ works, readers’ photos, riddles (those who submitted their own riddles), etc. Their geographical distribution is shown in Fig. 2. This widespread readership implies that the magazine successfully captured the attention and interest of young readers in Malaya.

Most of these Chinese Malayan junior reporters were recruited in 1947 and 1948, with nine of them joining in 1947 and fifteen in 1948.¹ This indicates a surge in *Modern Children*’s popularity during this period. This increased participation could be a result of the publication’s growing reputation, effective promotion strategies, and an increasing demand for children’s reading materials after WWII. Regarding the promotion strategies, *Modern Children* had encouraged readers to introduce the

Table 2 Demographics of the Chinese Malaysian junior reporters and the distribution of articles published.				
Region	Gender	Age	Number of articles published	Topic
Perak (11)	Female (5)	13 (1)	3	Opinions about Children’s Day (1)
		14 (3)		Situations of underprivileged children (1)
		15 (1)		Fishing (1)
	Male (6)	13 (1)	1	Situations of underprivileged children (1)
		14 (1)		
Singapore (9)	Female (2)	15 (4)	1	Friends (1)
		13 (2)		Malayan culture (1)
	Male (7)	13 (2)	4	Situations of underprivileged children (1)
		14 (1)		Helping others (1)
		15 (1)		Reporting school event (1)
		16 (2)		
Kedah (2)	Female (0)	N/A	0	N/A
	Male (2)	15 (1)	1	Situations of underprivileged children (1)
		16 (1)		
Melaka (2)	Female (1)	12 (1)	1	Malayan culture (1)
	Male (0)	N/A	0	N/A
	Unknown (1)	Unknown (1)	4	Malayan culture (2)
Sarawak (2)	Female (0)	N/A	0	Situations of underprivileged children (2)
	Male (2)	N/A	0	N/A
		16 (1)		N/A
Johor (1)	Female (0)	17 (1)	0	N/A
	Male (1)	N/A	0	N/A
North Borneo (1)	Female (0)	15 (1)	0	N/A
	Male (1)	N/A	0	N/A
Total (28)	Female (8)	N/A	2	Malayan culture (1)
	Male (19)	13 (1)		Malayan natural landscape (1)
	Unknown (1)	14 (5)		
		15 (8)		
		16 (4)		
		17 (2)		
		Unknown (1)		

Numbers in parentheses are the frequencies.



Fig. 1 Geographical distribution of the twenty-eight Chinese Malaysian junior reporters, each represented by a red dot. The original map was created by SimpleMaps.com (<https://simplemaps.com/gis/country/my>). We modified the map by adding the red dots, location labels, and exact numbers in parentheses. We also increased the transparency of the original map to show our red dots and labels more clearly. This figure is covered by the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. Reproduced with permission of SimpleMaps.com; copyright © SimpleMaps.com, Ruby Ka Yee Hui and Dechao Li, all rights reserved.

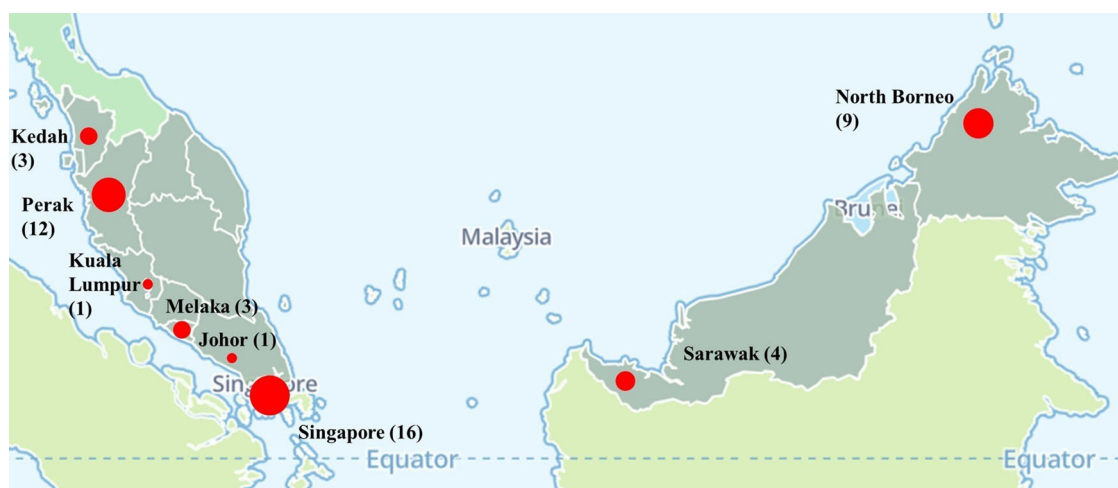


Fig. 2 Geographical distribution of all identified Chinese Malaysian readers, represented proportionally by red dots. The original map was created by SimpleMaps.com (<https://simplemaps.com/gis/country/my>). We modified the map by adding the red dots, location labels, and exact numbers in parentheses. The red dots are proportional to the number of identified Chinese Malaysian readers in each area. We also increased the transparency of the original map to show our red dots and labels more clearly. This figure is covered by the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. Reproduced with permission of SimpleMaps.com; copyright © SimpleMaps.com, Ruby Ka Yee Hui and Dechao Li, all rights reserved.

magazine to more children since 1947. More details about promotion are discussed in a later section with the heading “Chinese Malaysian readers’ active promotion and voluntary subscription”.

Modern Children’s recruitment of new junior reporters seemed to be suspended in 1949 because it had not published a list of new junior reporters since the issue no. 133 (February 16, 1949) based on our available data on hand. The magazine had suspended the section of children’s news reports because the civil war in mainland China had greatly affected correspondence (Modern Children 1949a). After the war, it started to call for manuscripts from junior reporters again.

Moreover, there was the Emergency Act in Malaya during 1948–1960 due to Malayan Communist Party’s armed revolt in 1948, with around 1,000 Chinese publications banned in this period to prevent the influence of Communism (Wong 2002; Th’ng 2019). Schools were raided for searching illegal books (Th’ng 2019). As the government did not give clear criteria of which books should be banned, Chinese books became political sensitive in such a tense atmosphere, with some schools even hiding Lu Xun’s 魯迅 books to avoid getting into troubles (Th’ng 2019). Evidence shows that *Modern Children* was not banned at least until 1950 because the magazine still had its sales agency in Malaya in December 1949 (Modern Children 1949b). While young readers still sent letters to “Yun Zi Zi’s Mailbox”, the Emergency Act seemed to affect the recruitment of junior reporters. In such a tense political atmosphere, readers might want to keep some distance with *Modern Children*. Signing up as a junior reporter would show greater commitment to the magazine and thus build a stronger connection with it, which was unfavourable for the safety of the reader. By sending letters to “Yun Zi Zi’s Mailbox”, the readers did not have any commitments to the magazine and might face fewer troubles. These reasons help to explain why the number of new junior reporters from Malaya witnessed a sudden drop in 1949 but Chinese Malaysian readers continued to correspond with Huang in “Yun Zi Zi’s Mailbox”.

When it comes to Chinese Malaysian junior reporters’ contributions to the content, they submitted articles about local customs and social situations to the magazine. As reported by Table 2, two main topics of the junior reporters’ articles were

Malayan culture and the situations of underprivileged children in society. For example, a young respondent named Wu Yangmei 吳揚眉 from Melaka contributed four articles to the magazine. Wu’s articles introduced indigenous Malayan culture, including descriptions of Malayan new year traditions (Wu 1947c) and Malayan wedding customs (Wu 1947b) and portrayals of the plight of underprivileged children residing in Wu’s neighbourhood (1946, 1947a). Feng Yikuan 馮溢寬 (Feng 1947b) from Singapore covered various aspects of Malayan culture, such as clothing, food, houses, people’s occupations and religion, in his article. Ye Baoyuan 葉保元 (Ye 1948) from North Borneo wrote articles about the culture of an indigenous tribe in Malaya. Zeng Songhua 曾松華 (Zeng 1949) from Kedah reported the news in which the superstition of two parents led to a delay in medical treatment and ultimately the death of their daughter, and Du Shuiyuan (Du 1947a) from Perak documented a case of child bullying by an adult. The Chinese Malaysian children’s selection of the topics of Malayan culture reflect their curiosity and interests about different cultures. They also showed their empathy about other underprivileged children by reporting their observations in the society.

These articles written by Chinese Malaysian young readers presented cultural knowledge to other Chinese children and added an exotic flavour to the magazine, constituting intercultural communication and manifesting influences from Malayan culture. By providing a platform for Chinese Malaysian young readers to share their stories and perspectives, the magazine created a space for dialogue, understanding, and cultural exchange. Through these articles written by Chinese Malaysian young readers, children gained a deeper understanding of the diverse practices and beliefs that shaped the lives of their peers. This could increase their cultural knowledge and promote empathy and cultural sensitivity.

Chinese Malaysian children’s comments about *Modern Children*.

In 1947, *Modern Children* celebrated its 100th issue by publishing some short comments about the magazine from readers. Among those comments, four were given by Chinese Malaysian young readers. Through Chinese Malaysian children’s letters to “Yun Zi Zi’s Mailbox”, we could also have a glimpse of their comments

Table 3 Chinese Malayan young readers' comments about <i>Modern Children</i> .			
Issue	Reader's name	Malayan Region	Comment
No. 100 (October 1, 1947)	You Zengqiang 游增強	Singapore	新兒童真是我們兒童的指南針，很適合我們學生看的。(Modern Children is truly a compass for our children and is very suitable for our students to read.) (You 1947, p. 42)
No. 100 (October 1, 1947)	Liang Zhiguo 梁志國	Singapore	我是貴刊的讀者。我愛護貴刊等於自己的生命一樣，後因日寇南侵，交通斷絕。使我不能與我的好朋友見面，真感覺得無限悲痛。後來忽然接得貴刊把我快活得幾乎跳起來。哈哈我又和我底好朋友新兒童見面了。久別無恙，身體比前更堅實。(I am a reader of the magazine. I cherish the magazine as much as my own life. Later, due to the Japanese's southward invasion, transportation was cut off. This made it impossible for me to meet my good friend, and I felt very sad. Suddenly, I received the magazine, which made me so happy that I almost jumped up. Haha, I met my good friend Modern Children again. After a long separation, you are safe and sound, and your body is even stronger than before.) (Liang 1947, pp. 45-46)
No. 100 (October 1, 1947)	Feng Yikuan 馮溢寬	Singapore	啊！真是有趣，它給我講故事，說笑話。比學校裡的先生講的還要有趣。又給我許多好的科學常識。這些都是課本上沒有的。本來今天要和哥哥妹妹去海濱游泳，現在因為有這樣好的書看，所以便把去游泳的念頭打消了。(Ah! It's really interesting. It tells me stories and jokes. It's even more interesting than what the teachers say at school. It also gives me a lot of good scientific knowledge. These things cannot be found in textbooks. Originally, I was going to swim at the beach with my elder brother and younger sister today, but now that I have such a good book to read, I've dismissed the idea of swimming.) (Feng 1947a, p. 44)
No. 100 (October 1, 1947)	Zeng Haishan 曾海山	Johor	自從得到哥哥在峇株吧轄新亞書局，給我訂閱一份新兒童之後，得到很多智識！(Since my elder brother subscribed to Modern Children for me from the New Asia Bookstore in Batu Pahat, I have gained a lot of knowledge!) (Zeng 1947, p. 43)
No. 117 (June 16, 1948)	Zhou Yurong 周玉容	Perak	我一翻開了新兒童，就得著無限的知識，無限的安慰，尤其是雲姊姊的信箱，我更羨慕，因為你替我們解答了許多難題，我們非常感謝你！(As soon as I open Modern Children, I gain boundless knowledge and infinite comfort. I especially like Yun Zi Zi's Mailbox because you have solved many difficult problems for us. We are very grateful to you!) (Zhou 1948, p. 52)
No. 147 (September 16, 1949)	Huang Fuchuan 黃福傳	North Borneo	今天我到叔父家裡去，叔父的兒子良哥哥說：「新兒童」是解答小孩子的問題的，那是我歡喜到跳起來，回到家裡，馬上寫了這封信，想請姊姊替我解答這些問題。(Today, I went to my uncle's house. My uncle's son, Liang Ge Ge, said: Modern Children is for answering children's questions. I was so happy that I jumped up. When I got home, I immediately wrote this letter, hoping that Zi Zi could help me answer these questions.) (Huang 1949, p. 26)
No. 151 (November 16, 1949)	Wu Ming 吳明	Nanyang	我看了十分歡喜。我從新兒童裡得到很多新知識，尤其是雲姊姊信箱裡面答復了我許多最需要知道的問題。(I was extremely pleased to read it. I have gained a lot of new knowledge from Modern Children, especially from Yun Zi Zi's Mailbox, which has answered many questions that I needed to know the most.) (Wu 1949, p. 26)
No. 154 (January 1, 1950)	Zhang Yingyong 張英勇	Singapore	自從定了貴刊之後，補助我的學業逐漸進步，我很愛新兒童，因它給了我很多知識，並且還有很多有趣的故事和美麗圖畫。(Since subscribing to your magazine, my academic performance has gradually improved. I love Modern Children very much because it has given me a lot of knowledge, and there are also many interesting stories and beautiful illustrations.) (Zhang 1950, p. 20)
The English translations were produced by the authors.			

and attitudes about *Modern Children*. These served as a direct reflection of the magazine’s reception in Malaya.

Seven children in Table 3 accentuated the education function of the magazine, which brought them a lot of valuable knowledge. Apart from learning, the magazine provided them with entertainment. As Feng Yikuan and Zhang Yingyong pointed out, there were interesting stories and jokes and beautiful illustrations in the magazine that captured their interest. In the 1940s, there were not many forms of entertainment for children like the various toys and electronic devices nowadays, and thus children’s literary magazines were very appealing to them (Cao 2014). With a colourful and well-designed cover, a wide variety of sections, and the opportunity for young readers to publish their works, *Modern Children* was able to attract children in Malaya.

Liang Zhiguo’s personification of *Modern Children* as his “good friend” and Zhou Yurong’s feeling that the magazine gave her “infinite comfort” are particularly illuminating, as they underscored the emotional bond that the magazine successfully forged with its young readership in Malaya. This affective connection transcends mere entertainment or education, suggesting a deeper level of engagement and identification. The magazine’s ability to cultivate such a meaningful relationship with its readers is a testament to its effectiveness in resonating with the needs, interests, and aspirations of children during that period.

Huang Ching-yuen’s visit to Singapore. In 1947, Huang received a scholarship to study for a master’s degree at Columbia University in New York (Leung 2010). In 1948, she finished her degree and returned to Hong Kong. On her way back to Hong Kong, her ship stopped at Singapore for one day on November 17, 1948, and she was invited by the Singapore Yeung Ching

Table 4 Number of new subscriptions acquired by young readers and teacher.

Category	Name	Region	No. of new subscriptions acquired
Young reader	Yin Ruizhen 尹瑞珍	Perak	32
	Zhou Yurong 周玉容	Perak	5
	Ye Baoyuan 葉保元	North Borneo	2
	Du Shuiyuan 杜水源	Perak	1
	Feng Yikuan 馮溢寬	Singapore	1
Teacher	Liang (teacher librarian)	Perak	6

School (養正學校) to give a speech (Kuang 1948), which belongs to intercultural communication. *Modern Children* published an article written by Kuang Zhiyi 鄺志義, a student from Yeung Ching School, who described the event (Kuang 1948). This welcome party held for Huang offers insights into *Modern Children's* reception in Singapore. The eagerness of the students to meet Huang, as shown by Kuang's article, indicates the popularity of Yun Zi Zi. The fact that the school took the initiative to organise a dedicated welcome party for Huang also suggests that the magazine was highly valued and recognised, reflecting the magazine's overall success and its ability to captivate and engage readers in Singapore.

Chinese schools in Malaya attached high importance to the education of Chinese language and culture (Wong 2002), but in the 1940s, Chinese literary magazines for children in Malaya were very limited (Cao 2014; Fok 2014). It was under this context that *Modern Children* emerged as a publication that could help bridge this gap and provide a platform for Chinese Malayan children to access suitable literary content. As a Chinese school, Yeung Ching School in Singapore was very supportive of children's literary magazines in Chinese, and it understood the value of providing children with access to literary resources that reflected their cultural heritage and language. Lin Yaoxiang 林耀翔, the headmaster of Yeung Ching School, even helped promote the magazine by writing letters to other schools (Modern Children 1948a). When the school received the news that Huang's ship would stay in Singapore, it seized the opportunity to invite Huang to meet its students. This shows the popularity and prestige of *Modern Children* in Singapore.

Chinese Malayan readers' active promotion and voluntary subscription. *Modern Children* had encouraged readers to promote and introduce the magazine to other children since 1947, by publishing the names of the readers who successfully brought new subscribers and giving them the title of "glorious reader". In the issue no. 129 (Modern Children 1948c), the magazine announced a list of glorious readers who could receive prizes for acquiring new subscribers for the magazine. A record of a teacher acquiring new subscriptions was also observed (Modern Children 1947a). Table 4 summarises the information about these "promoters" of *Modern Children* up to December 1948.

On top of the list was Yin Ruizhen from Ipoh, Perak, who secured thirty-two new subscriptions to the magazine in total. Zhou Yurong also brought five new subscriptions. Therefore, readers in Malaya put great efforts into introducing the magazine to others. Additionally, teachers in Malaya helped promote the magazine, including Liang, who was a teacher librarian in Perak (Modern Children 1947a), and Lin Yaoxiang, the headmaster of Singapore Yeung Ching School, who praised *Modern Children* as the best children's magazine at that time and invited other schools in Malaya to subscribe (Modern Children 1948a). The attempts of teachers and children to promote *Modern Children* served as evidence of the popularity of this Hong Kong-based magazine in Malaya.

In addition, two Chinese Malayan children engaged in voluntary subscription for a student in mainland China. This altruistic and charitable act of voluntary subscription for underprivileged children was initiated by three young readers from mainland China and Hong Kong in 1947 (Modern Children 1947b). This was commended by the magazine and followed by other readers. According to the issue no. 109 (Modern Children 1948d), the editor's note highlighted that Yin Ruizhen and Liang Qiuxian 梁秋賢 from Perak would together purchase twelve issues of the magazine for a poor child who could not afford to subscribe. The editorial office designated a beneficiary, who was a secondary school student in mainland China. The editor also asked the beneficiary to engage in direct correspondence with Yin and Liang.

Such kindness and generosity demonstrated by the children underscores their love for the magazine and the profound sense of compassion that the magazine had cultivated among its readers. *Modern Children* served as a medium to establish loving and caring relationships among young readers. The editor's encouragement of direct correspondence between the benefactors and the beneficiary potentially added an additional layer of depth to this charitable act. Although there is no clear evidence whether these three children indeed corresponded with each other, it is undeniable that the magazine attempted to facilitate intercultural communication and establish a personal connection between children that extended beyond mere financial support.

In short, the Chinese Malayan readers' active promotion and voluntary subscription illustrate great popularity of *Modern Children* in Malaya, as well as their strong passion for the magazine. By providing a platform that inspired and facilitated altruistic behaviour, *Modern Children* also demonstrated its capacity to shape the moral character of its readership by encouraging readers to extend empathy and support to those in need.

Influences of *Modern Children* on *World Children*. The first local children's magazine in Malaya was *Young Malayan*, which was established in 1946 and ended in 1957 (Lim 2016; Xu 2016b). In 1950, a much longer-lived local children's magazine, *World Children*, was born, which ceased publishing in 1978 (Cao 2014; Lim 2016). *World Children* remains one of the most esteemed children's magazines in Singaporean history (Cao 2014). To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to discover great similarities between *Modern Children* and *World Children*, which exemplify *Modern Children's* influences on this Chinese Malayan children's magazine. The similarities are listed and explained below. We also compared these two magazines with earlier children's magazines such as those established in mainland China, *Little Friend* (小朋友) (1922–) and *Children's World* (兒童世界) (1922–1941), in order to support our claim that *Modern Children*, as a predecessor, exerted influences on *World Children*.

- (1) Prominent sisterly figure. *Modern Children* had the section "Yun Zi Zi's Mailbox" (literally elder sister Yun's mailbox). Characterised by Huang Ching-yuen's kind and friendly

tone in answering children's questions, the mailbox was very popular among young readers (Leung 2010). On the other hand, *World Children's* first editor-in-chief, Huang Shizhe 黃士哲, referred to herself as "Zhe Zi Zi" 哲姊姊, which literally means "elder sister Zhe" (Cao et al. 2014). By adopting this intimate title, Huang Shizhe also positioned herself as a caring, approachable sisterly figure who could guide and relate to young readers. Additionally, *World Children* introduced Wei Jie Jie 薇姐姐 (literally elder sister Wei), who at first told stories in the magazine and later changed to take over the mailbox section, with the section title "Wei Jie Jie's Mailbox" 薇姐姐信箱 (literally elder sister Wei's mailbox) (Cao et al. 2014). This mailbox section served a similar purpose as "Yun Zi Zi's Mailbox", providing a platform for readers to ask difficult questions and seek advice or support. As such, the selling point of both magazines seems to be a sisterly figure who would care for young readers and kindly respond to their needs. The prominent sisterly role in both magazines served to create a strong emotional connection with their readers and establish a sense of trust and belonging among their young readerships.

There were both similarities and differences between these editor figures and those in foreign children's periodicals. For example, the British children's magazines, the *Boy's Own Paper* (1879–1967) and the *Girl's Own Paper* (1880–1956) also featured similar avuncular editor figures in their correspondence sections (Chen and Moruzi 2019). However, these editor figures sometimes communicated with young readers with a rather unsupportive and discouraging attitude, as reflected in their control over correspondences with "consistent and definitive dismissals" (Fox 2018, p. 48) and their sarcastic remarks on some children's letters (Chen and Moruzi 2019), which were not observed in *Modern Children* and *World Children*. Children's columns in New Zealand also presented a number of uncle-like or aunt-like editor figures such as Dot's Little Folk, Uncle Ned, Uncle Ted, Aunt Hilda, and Uncle Toby (Gilderdale 2019). These avuncular figures show a different image with the sister figures in terms of age or hierarchy. In short, sister figures in *Modern Children* and *World Children* were mutually similar while having different features compared with other editor figures overseas, providing support to the argument that *World Children* received influences from *Modern Children*.

- (2) Criteria of publishing in the mailbox section. In the mailbox section of each issue, *Modern Children* explicitly printed the criteria of how they would select the letters to be published, which stated that "有意思的先答, 先到的先登" (The interesting ones will be answered first; the earlier ones will be published first) (Huang 1943, p. 26). According to the issue no. 15 of *World Children* (1951, p. 23), the editor's note set similar criteria for publishing in the mailbox: "有意義的先刊, 先到的先登" (The meaningful ones will be published first; the earlier ones will be published first). The criteria set by both magazines are highly similar, in terms of sentence structure and meaning.
- (3) Similar section names for the editors' note. In *Modern Children*, the section for editorial office's notes or announcements was named "編輯室播音" (Broadcast from editorial office). In *World Children*, the same section also had the name "編輯室播音", although sometimes it was called "編輯室廣播" (still, the literal meaning is broadcast from editorial office) or "編輯室播音台" (Editorial office's broadcasting station) (Cao et al. 2014). Both magazines adopted the metaphor of "broadcast" to

name the section. Although earlier children's magazines in mainland China also had editorial teams who communicated with readers, they used different names for the section. For example, *Children's World* called it "編輯者話" (A message from the editor) (Children's World 1931) and *Little Friend* "編輯室談話" (A message from the editorial office) (Little Friend 1931).

- (4) Similar section names and layouts for readers' photos. *Modern Children* had launched a section to publish readers' photos since the issue no. 84 (February 1, 1947). This section was named "愛讀本刊的讀者" (Readers who love to read this magazine). Similarly, *World Children* had also opened a section called "愛讀本刊的小朋友" (Children who love to read this magazine), since the issue no. 8 (Cao et al. 2014). Although earlier children's magazines in mainland China also featured readers' photos, they gave different names to the section. For example, *Children's World* (兒童世界) called the section "讀者照片" (Readers' photos) (Children's World 1931).² We could observe that *Modern Children* and *World Children* used very similar wording for the section name. Sometimes the layout of readers' photos was also highly similar in both magazines, when they arranged the photos in rows with the reader's location and name under each photo. But for *Children's World* and *Little Friend*, they usually did not include readers' locations, and *Little Friend* sometimes did not include readers' names (Children's World 1931; Little Friend 1947). Therefore, we argue that *Modern Children* and *World Children* adopted very similar names and layouts for readers' photos, which were also different from earlier children's magazines.
- (5) Special edition for readers' works. Although both *Modern Children* and *World Children* published a certain number of readers' works in each issue, they occasionally launched special editions for readers' works, which means that the issue consisted entirely of works contributed by children. Both magazines called their special editions "兒童作品專號" (Special edition for children's works).
- (6) Promotion strategies. Since 1947, *Modern Children* had encouraged readers to introduce the magazine to their friends (Modern Children 1947a). In December 1948, the magazine announced that prizes would be given to the "glorious readers", who introduced the magazine to their peers and successfully brought new subscriptions (Modern Children 1948c). *World Children* adopted a similar promotion strategy. According to issue no. 182, *World Children* was going to hold an "Introduce a Friend" contest, urging readers to introduce the magazine to their friends to win a prize (Cao et al. 2014). Both magazines mainly offered books as prizes.³

We argue that there are two main reasons for the similarities between *Modern Children* and *World Children*. The first reason might be that *Modern Children* had set an example to establish a close connection between children and magazine, and this formed an expectation from young readers. In other words, the similarities between the two magazines were driven by the taste of young readers. In 1951, *World Children* launched the mailbox section in response to young readers' request:

Many children have written to us, requesting that we add a "mailbox" column dedicated to answering various difficult questions from young readers. We are willing to accept this valuable suggestion. If children have any questions they want to explore, they are welcome to write to us. (World Children 1951, p. 23)⁴

Therefore, *World Children's* introduction of the mailbox section was a direct response to the demand from its readership. We posit that the success of *Modern Children* set a precedent, leading to an anticipation among young readers who yearned for the inclusion of similar sections in *World Children*. The young audience, having witnessed the great benefits of “Yun Zi Zi’s Mailbox”, might have developed a keen appetite for a comparable platform that would cater to their curiosity and provide them with a space to raise their questions and seek guidance. The resounding success of “Yun Zi Zi’s Mailbox” in *Modern Children* had not only captured the attention of its target audience but also set a new standard in reader engagement. Its approach to addressing a wide array of topics, ranging from science to personal life and society, and its strategies in enhancing the social connection, had struck a chord with young readers, who found solace and enlightenment in the well-crafted responses and expanded social circles. This achievement had inadvertently created a paradigm shift in the expectations of the readership, who now yearned for a similar experience within the pages of *World Children*.

The second possible reason for the similarities is that the operation of *World Children* involved the participation of Hong Kong publisher. The editor’s note in the issue no. 29 of *World Children* mentioned that the editorial office was in Jakarta, the head office in Singapore, and the printing in Hong Kong (World Children 1952). But in the issue no. 73 in 1955, the imprint page of *World Children* stated that the publisher of the magazine was the World Publishing Company in 60 Connaught Road Central, Hong Kong, with the printer also a company in Hong Kong (World Children 1955). Lim (2016) confirmed that Chou Sing Chu 周星衢 (1905–1986), the owner of the World Publishing Company, set up a subsidiary in Hong Kong to publish textbooks and magazines, which included *World Children*. As such, there was heavy involvement of Hong Kong personnel in the production of this Chinese Malayan magazine. In view of this, *World Children* was likely influenced by the style of *Modern Children* to some extent, because the personnel in the World Publishing Company’s Hong Kong office might be familiar with the earlier local children’s magazines in Hong Kong and likely have drawn inspiration from *Modern Children*’s approaches and strategies. By incorporating elements from a Hong Kong-based children’s literary magazine into a Chinese Malayan magazine, this constitutes a hybridisation of cultures.

The incorporation of elements from the Hong Kong-based children’s literary magazine, *Modern Children*, into the Chinese Malayan magazine, *World Children*, represents a fascinating example of cultural hybridisation, or transcultural communication. This process involves the blending and merging of cultural elements from different regions, resulting in the creation of a unique and dynamic cultural product. In this case, elements of Hong Kong’s children literary culture were transplanted into the Chinese Malayan context. This hybridisation of cultures is significant because it demonstrates the fluidity and adaptability of cultural practices and forms. It shows how ideas, styles, and approaches can transcend geographical boundaries and be reinterpreted and reshaped to suit different cultural contexts. *World Children* represented a unique combination of Hong Kong and Chinese Malayan cultural elements, catering to the specific needs and preferences of its target audience. In this sense, *Modern Children* also had its important role in Singaporean and Malayan history of children’s literature, by influencing the development of indigenous children’s publications in Malaya.

Moreover, this cultural hybridisation highlights the interconnectedness of the Chinese diaspora and the ways in which cultural exchanges and influences can occur within these

communities. The involvement of Hong Kong personnel in the production of a Chinese Malayan magazine illustrates the networks and connections that existed between different Chinese communities in Southeast Asia during this period.

Conclusion

This study has explored the reception of *Modern Children* in Malaya. As *Modern Children* was the first children’s literary magazine established in Hong Kong, it is meaningful and important to investigate how a Hong Kong-based children’s literary magazine was first received overseas. In this study, we focused on Malaya because it was the largest overseas market for *Modern Children*.

Our findings reveal the reception and achievements of *Modern Children* in Malaya. The magazine facilitated intercultural and transcultural communication. For intercultural communication, the magazine served as a platform for cultural exchange, allowing direct communication between the editor and the Chinese Malayan children, as shown by the examples of “Yun Zi Zi’s Mailbox” and Huang Ching-yuen’s invited visit to Singapore Yeung Ching School due to the great popularity of the magazine among Chinese Malayan children. Chinese Malayan readers also contributed to the content of the magazine by submitting their original articles about indigenous Malayan culture, widening other Chinese children’s horizon about foreign culture. Chinese Malayan young readers’ comments about the magazine reveal its educational and entertainment function, as well as the emotional connection it successfully established with young readers. Furthermore, *Modern Children* shaped moral values of Chinese Malayan children by inspiring the altruistic act of voluntary subscription from young readers. These are the evidence that illuminates the significantly positive reception of *Modern Children* in Malaya and the mutual influences between this Hong Kong magazine and Malayan readers.

For transcultural communication, we have observed the influences of *Modern Children* on *World Children*, which was a children’s literary magazine established in Malaya. Similarities were identified between the two magazines. Part of those similar features was driven by the request of *World Children*’s readers. As a predecessor, *Modern Children* set an exemplar and might have led young readers’ taste and expectation, which in turn influenced *World Children*’s content and strategies. There was also involvement of Hong Kong staff members of the World Publishing Company in the production of *World Children*, which was an important reason for explaining the similarities between the two magazines. As elements of children’s literary culture in Hong Kong were transplanted into the Chinese Malayan context, we argue that this constitutes an example of cultural hybridisation, which involves mixing cultural elements from different regions and results in the creation of a unique cultural product. This highlights the significance of *Modern Children* in the development of Chinese Malayan children’s literature.

As argued by Robertson and White (2007), connectivity and consciousness are the two core elements in defining globalisation. The case of *Modern Children* magazine presents a meaningful example of an increase in connectivity among children from different regions in the 1940s, while consciousness might reflect in their understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity and global interconnectedness. The magazine’s ability to forge connections between children in Hong Kong and Malaya, as evidenced by the exchange of letters, photos, and even charitable acts, underscores its capacity to build bridges and promote a spirit of unity and empathy. These interactions, facilitated by the magazine, provide valuable insights into the ways in which

children's literature can serve as a vehicle for cross-border communication and understanding in an era of globalisation.

Overall, this study explored the intricate relationship between Hong Kong and Malaya in the context of children's literary magazine. By delving into this specific context, this research provides a fresh perspective on the historical development of children's publication in Hong Kong, highlighting its significance and influences beyond the city. The findings of this study make a significant contribution to the existing body of knowledge surrounding Hong Kong's literary heritage and illustrate the complex dynamics between Hong Kong and Malaya within this sphere.

Moreover, this study underscores the pivotal role that a specific Hong Kong children's literary magazine played in the broader tapestry of Asian history. By serving as a conduit for ideas, narratives, and connections that transcended geographical boundaries, *Modern Children* emerged as a powerful force in shaping the literary landscape of the time. Its influences extended beyond the realm of mere entertainment or education, as it fostered emotional bonding and cultural understanding among its young readers across different nations. Furthermore, by situating *Modern Children* within the wider context of Asian history, we have demonstrated how children's magazines and children's literature can reflect the interconnectedness of literary and cultural activities across the region.

Data availability

The datasets generated during and analysed during the current study are available from the author(s) on reasonable request.

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Notes

- 1 In 1946, three new junior reporters from Malaya were recruited. In 1949, only one new recruit from Malaya was recorded.
- 2 We also found that *Little Friend* (小朋友) sometimes called the section “愛讀小朋友的小朋友” [Children who love to read *Little Friend*] (*Little Friend* (1947) Duzhe zhaopian [Readers' photos]. *Little Friend* 848:back cover). But combining the considerations of other similar features between *Modern Children* and *World Children*, we believe that there were likely influences from *Modern Children* on *World Children* to a certain extent.
- 3 *Little Friend* also employed a similar promotion strategy and rewarded those who secured new subscriptions to the magazine. But *Little Friend* attracted readers mainly with the rewards of toys, though book coupons could be selected instead. *Modern Children* and *World Children* did not offer any toys but books. *World Children* even provided cash rewards and trophies as higher prizes.
- 4 The English translation was produced by the authors.

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Author contributions

Ruby Ka Yee Hui initiated the research idea, collected the data, performed the analyses, and wrote the initial manuscript, while Dechao Li provided guidance throughout this paper's development and refined the manuscript.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethical approval

Not applicable because this study does not involve any human participants.

Informed consent

Not applicable because this study does not involve any human participants.

Additional information

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