Abstract

The intention of this paper is to study the character and role of the 'Letters to the Editor' column of the four main newspapers in Singapore: '言論' and '議者之聲' of Nanyang Siang Pau; '議者之聲' of Sin Chew Jit Poh; 'Letters to the Editor' of the Straits Times; 'Viewpoint' of The Singapore Herald.

Content Analysis was used as a method to cover those letters which appeared in March 1971.

Special attention was paid to the differences between letters appearing in the two Chinese newspapers and in the two English newspapers, to discover the different social attitudes of Chinese and English newspaper readers.

The 'Government Replies', being a part of the 'Letters to the Editor' column in Singapore's newspapers has also been considered.

The final results of the study are as follows:-

(1) The 'Letters to the Editors' column is a part of public opinion in Singapore. Most letters are concerned with complaint or request for information. Although the column is a means of expression for the people, its' role is the passive one of 'complaint box' functioning as a medium of communication between government and people.
(2) From the letters it appears that the readers lack social and political consciousness. They care only for their own self-interest. They also express a strong tendency to depend on help from the government.

(3) The main topics which Chinese newspaper readers discussed were generally different from those of English newspaper readers. On occasions when they discussed the same topic, their point of view was usually different. Therefore we may suppose that there is little intercommunication between readers of Chinese and English newspapers.

(4) The 'Government Replies' were mainly concerned with the letters of complaint and of request for information. They were always short, official in tone and concerned with petty detail, while their contents often recurred without variation.

However, the development of such a column in a democratic society is important, therefore, the government and the newspapers should improve their policies and attitudes towards this column. Intellectuals should also be involved. It should develop as an influential forum of public opinion, serving as a reference for government policy and as a force contributing to the evolution of society.