Zhang Jing Yun
(张景云, 1940–)
Poet, translator, journalist, Malaysia

Zhang Jing Yun is well known as an outspoken current affairs and cultural commentator in Malaysian Chinese newspapers. He has also achieved considerable success as a poet, writer, and translator, and has a reputation for being a paradox. Even though he is a well respected journalist, poet and writer, he does not consider himself an author. While he is affable and capable of communicating well with individuals from all walks of life, he is not a member of any club or association. Despite his excellent writing ability and the numerous articles and commentaries he contributes to Chinese newspapers in Malaysia, he has decided not to be a member of the Association of Malaysian Chinese Writers. This decision was not as much rooted in vanity as in humility, for Zhang does not consider himself a “true writer”, because he believes a “true writer” ought to be creative. He feels his writings are not true literary creations because they are merely analytical comments on what is unfolding in the world.

While Zhang may be modest about his writing abilities, he is also pragmatic. For instance, he is a member of the National Union of Journalists in Malaysia only because he knows being part of the union would safeguard his career in journalism. Despite his eccentricities, he remains a respected writer in the Malaysian Chinese community. At present, he is the chief cultural and current affairs commentator at Oriental Daily News (东方日报). He has previously been the chief cultural and current affairs commentator for a number of Chinese newspapers in Malaysia, such as New Bulletin or Xin Tong Bao (新通报) and Nanyang Business Daily, better known by its transliterated Chinese name, Nanyang Siang Pau (南洋商报). He has also spent some time at the Centre for Malaysian Chinese Studies as a researcher.

Zhang’s ancestors hailed from Tong’an in the Fujian province of China, but Zhang himself was born in Burma (now known as the Union of Myanmar) on 11 January 1940. By the time the Second World War broke out, he was in Penang, an island in Peninsula Malaysia. He received much of his early education in Penang, but dropped out of school at the age of sixteen. Soon after leaving school, he worked in various jobs in Penang, Perlis, and Singapore. Anxious to make a living, Zhang took a wide variety of jobs. Before he became a cultural and current affairs commentator, he worked as a part-time teacher, a clerk at a rubber plantation, a painting worker, and a band manager at a nightclub.

Despite leaving school at that early age, he never stopped trying to improve himself through reading. This may be gleaned from his experiences in Singapore soon after leaving school. During his first visit to Singapore in 1958–60, he sought to improve his understanding of art by working as a manager of an art gallery. He also took the opportunity to broaden his cultural horizons by immersing