

## Trans-temporal Discursivities: AI Translation, Colonial Memory, and the French Media Representation of Malaya (Diskursiviti Trans-temporal: Terjemahan AI, Memori Kolonial, dan Representasi Media Perancis terhadap Tanah Melayu)

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the media representations of Malaya in French colonial newspapers between 1936 and 1941, with emphasis on the role of editorial gatekeeping and the mediating effects of contemporary AI-assisted translation. It demonstrates how AI translation technologies reshape access to and interpretation of French colonial newspaper narratives, influencing how non-European cultures were understood. It also reveals how gatekeeping mechanisms operating within the French newspapers determined the selection, framing, and circulation of images of Malaya. Focusing on archival articles from Paris-Soir, the study adopts a qualitative and interpretive research design based on purposive sampling. Articles were accessed through AI-assisted translation, which is treated not merely as a technical aid but as an additional mediating layer in the interpretation of colonial-era texts. Semiotic analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis are employed to examine textual and visual elements, including headlines, narrative structures, and imagery, in order to identify dominant representational patterns. The findings show that French newspapers framed Malaya as a strategic and modernising space within imperial and commercial networks, with emphasis on infrastructure development, trade, and aviation. These representations were shaped by institutional gatekeeping and editorial filtering practices that prioritised metropolitan interests while marginalising indigenous voices, local social realities, and political tensions.*

*Keywords: Media representation; French newspapers; AI-assisted translation; Malaya; Gatekeeping*

### ABSTRAK

*Kajian ini menyiasat representasi media tentang Malaya dalam akhbar-akhbar kolonial Perancis antara tahun 1936 dan 1941, dengan memberi penekanan kepada peranan penapisan maklumat (editorial gatekeeping) dan kesan pengantaraan terjemahan berbantuan kecerdasan buatan (AI) kontemporari. Kajian ini menunjukkan bagaimana teknologi terjemahan AI membentuk semula akses dan interpretasi terhadap naratif akhbar kolonial Perancis, sekali gus mempengaruhi cara budaya bukan Eropah difahami. Ia juga mendedahkan bagaimana mekanisme penapisan maklumat yang beroperasi dalam akhbar Perancis menentukan pemilihan, pembingkai (framing), dan penyebaran imej-imej tentang Malaya. Dengan memfokuskan kepada artikel arkib daripada Paris-Soir, kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk penyelidikan kualitatif dan interpretif berdasarkan persampelan bertujuan. Artikel-artikel diakses melalui terjemahan berbantuan AI, yang tidak dianggap sekadar sebagai bantuan teknikal tetapi sebagai lapisan pengantaraan tambahan dalam menginterpretasikan teks-teks zaman kolonial. Analisis semiotik dan Analisis Wacana Kritis (CDA) digunakan untuk meneliti elemen tekstual dan visual, termasuk tajuk utama, struktur naratif, dan imejan, bagi mengenal pasti corak representasi yang dominan. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa akhbar-akhbar Perancis membingkai Malaya sebagai ruang yang strategik dan sedang mengalami pemodenan dalam rangkaian imperial dan komersial, dengan penekanan kepada pembangunan infrastruktur, perdagangan, dan penerbangan. Representasi ini dibentuk oleh amalan penapisan maklumat institusi dan penapisan editorial yang mengutamakan kepentingan metropolitan di samping meminggirkan suara peribumi, realiti sosial tempatan, serta ketegangan politik.*

*Kata kunci: Representasi media; Akhbar Perancis; Terjemahan berbantuan AI; Malaya; Penapisan maklumat (Gatekeeping)*

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## INTRODUCTION

The representation of Southeast Asia in Western media has long played a crucial role in shaping global understandings of the region. While Malaya was formally a British colony, its image and narrative were not confined to British discourse alone. French newspapers, despite France's limited direct colonial engagement with Malaya, contributed to the international construction of colonial knowledge through the ways in which the region was portrayed and framed. This process of meaning-making foregrounds the concept of "representation," understood not merely as description but as an interpretive act that assigns meaning to places, peoples, and events. Representation is commonly defined as the act of portraying or depicting information, whether visual, textual, or digital (Hall, 1997). In this sense, representations of Malaya in Western discourse functioned as a mechanism through which Southeast Asia was rendered intelligible to distant audiences, often reinforcing colonial hierarchies and imaginaries.

Representation is particularly salient in the context of media, where meaning is actively produced rather than passively transmitted. Hall (1997) argues that representation operates through language and discourse, positioning media as a central actor in shaping public perception. The history of the newspaper in France illustrates this dynamic. From the early seventeenth century until the French Revolution, newspapers were largely state-owned and regulated, before a rapid expansion of privately held publications in the late eighteenth century. Political figures such as Maximilien Robespierre and Jean-Paul Marat emerged as influential publishers during this period (Israel, 2015; Zublin, 2017). Newspapers increasingly served to shape public opinion rather than disseminate objective truth, often framing ideology in ways aligned with governmental interests (Mayssa, 2020). This instrumental role of the press became particularly evident during periods of conflict: French newspapers were tightly controlled during the Great War to mobilise support against Germany, while during World War II the media landscape was inverted as Nazi authorities manipulated French press institutions for propaganda purposes (Evans, 2013).

While scholarly attention to media representation has expanded across formats such as film, television, photography, and advertising particularly within European contexts, newspapers remain relatively underexplored despite their pervasive societal influence (Middleton, 1992; Pedersen et al., 1996; Edwards, 1997; Nixon, 1997; Sterr, 1997; Penttilä, 1999; Jokinen, 2000; Jarvelin 2005 as cited in Hearn et al., 2006; Case 2012; Sanjika, 2014; Nagel, 2015 and Wilson & George, 2017). As primary channels of daily communication with both national and local audiences, newspapers play a crucial role in shaping public understanding through the selection, prioritisation, and framing of news content. Schuck and De Vreese (2006) argue that media framing can lead to disproportionate emphasis on particular interpretations, while Happer and Philo (2013) demonstrate that such framing has lasting effects on public perception and political behaviour. Robinson (2000) further notes that newspapers become especially influential when audiences lack direct knowledge of the subject matter being reported.

This influence is particularly pronounced in the coverage of foreign and non-Western regions. Research on the portrayal of Third World countries in Western media has consistently shown strong associations between foreign news coverage and public opinion, suggesting a clear agenda-setting function (Turan et al., 2007). Given that most audiences have limited firsthand knowledge of events beyond their national borders, the press often serves as the primary, if not sole, source of information on global affairs. Consequently, representations circulated through newspapers significantly shape how distant regions are understood. Numerous studies have examined Western European and North American media portrayals of South Americans, Asians,

and Africans, finding that these populations are frequently depicted as communal, instinctive, and childlike (Hall, 2001).

These recurring representational patterns have been widely theorised within frameworks of cultural and media imperialism. Silverblatt and Zlobin (2004) argue that international media systems support cultural imperialism by enabling media-owning nations to export their values and worldviews. Boyd-Barrett (1977) defines media imperialism as a process whereby ownership, structure, distribution, or content of media flows from dominant nations to others without reciprocal power. Similarly, Schiller's (1976) concept of cultural imperialism highlights how societies are integrated into a global system by reshaping their institutions to align with the values of a dominant centre. Together, these frameworks help explain how Western media representations of non-European regions are embedded within broader structures of ideological and economic power.

In the case of Malaysia, international perceptions have long been shaped by externally produced media that reflect foreign assumptions and priorities (Khoo, 2009; Subramaniam & Pillai, 2009; Lee, 2015). Although scholarly attention to media representations of Malaysia has increased, misrepresentation persists, in part because limited attention has been paid to how editorial constraints and ideological gatekeeping shaped portrayals of Malaya in non-British European newspapers, particularly within the French press. While postcolonial scholarship has extensively interrogated colonial discourse and its ideological foundations, less consideration has been given to the role of translation and mediation in sustaining these representations over time. The emergence of AI translation technologies introduces a further, and largely underexplored, layer of mediation: rather than functioning as neutral tools, AI systems filter, reframe, and may reproduce historical biases embedded within source texts. This gap underscores the need for renewed critical engagement with both archival media and the technologies now used to access them.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines representations of Malaya in French newspapers between 1936 and 1941, with particular attention to how colonial narratives are accessed and interpreted through AI-assisted translation. By combining media representation analysis with a critical examination of translation technologies, the study seeks to illuminate how colonial-era meanings are reconstructed in contemporary research contexts. Specifically, the study is motivated by two objectives. The first is to examine how AI translation technologies reshape access to and interpretation of French colonial-era newspaper narratives and their influence on public discourse about non-European cultures. Secondly, it seeks to identify and analyse how gatekeeping mechanisms influenced the selection, framing, and circulation of representations of Malaya in French newspapers. Guided by these objectives, the study reflects on three main research questions. In what ways did French newspapers (1936–1941) report on the economic activities and colonial trade networks of Malaya? In what ways were French newspaper depictions of Malaya (1936–1941) influenced by broader geopolitical tensions and wartime developments? How does AI translation facilitate the identification and interpretation of gatekeeping mechanisms in these representations?

To ensure conceptual clarity and methodological consistency in addressing these research questions, it is necessary to specify how key terms are understood and applied within the scope of this study. Many of the concepts central to this research such as representation, gatekeeping, media framing, colonial discourse, and AI-assisted translation carry varied meanings across disciplines and scholarly traditions. The following section therefore provides operational definitions of these terms as they are employed in this analysis, establishing a shared analytical framework that guides data selection, interpretation, and discussion throughout the study.

Representation, according to Hall (1997), carries two meanings: it refers either to depicting something else or to conveying an idea that already existed and is shown through the media. He further argues that representation has become particularly significant within cultural studies, especially from a constructionist perspective. Closely related to representation is the concept of discourse, which refers to structured systems of language and meaning through which knowledge, power, and ideology are communicated. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as developed by Fairclough (1989) and Van Dijk (1993), provides a key methodological lens in this study, enabling a nuanced reading of lexical choices, metaphors, and narrative frames in French press coverage of Malaysia. Discourse is not neutral; rather, it reflects broader colonial epistemologies and power relations. Semiotics further supports this analysis by examining signs and symbols as systems of meaning. Drawing on Barthes (1964) and Chandler (2002), semiotics is used to analyse the visual and symbolic elements in French newspaper portrayals of Malaysia, including images, layouts, and headlines, which communicate both denotative and connotative meanings and contribute to an ideological construction of Southeast Asia.

Gatekeeping refers to the processes through which information is selected, shaped, and disseminated within media institutions. Initially conceptualised by Lewin (1947) and later developed by White (1950) and Shoemaker (2001), gatekeeping theory examines how editors, journalists, and institutional actors control the flow of news content. Closely related to this is filtering, which describes the editorial processes through which certain content is prioritised while other material is excluded, shaped by media routines, editorial guidelines, and institutional imperatives (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). These processes operate within the broader framework of news production, which encompasses the institutional, technical, and cultural conditions under which news is produced, including political climate, audience expectations, and historical context (Alarcón, 2010; Gioltzidou et al., 2023). Central to these processes are media actors—journalists, foreign correspondents, editors, and media owners—whose positionality, professional roles, and institutional affiliations influence representation. Underpinning these practices is ideology, understood as a system of ideas and values that legitimise power structures (Althusser, 1971; Hall, 1997). Ideology shapes how Malaysia was framed, often reinforcing racial, cultural, and colonial hierarchies. These framings frequently draw on orientalist narratives, conceptualised by Said (1978) as discourses that depict the East as exotic, backward, or inferior, as well as developmentalist narratives, which structure events into coherent plots that communicate intentionality and evaluation while describing who did what, where, and when (Labov & Waletzky, 1967).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In the 21st century, the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) translation technologies especially large language models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT has transformed traditional conceptions of translation and mediation. According to Sulaiman et al., (2025), ChatGPT has been said to handle complicated linguistic structures, contextual nuances, and stylistic variance with a level of fluency that surpasses preceding AI models. Unlike early statistical or rule-based translation systems, the 21st-Century AI models employ deep learning architectures that enhance contextual comprehension, semantic coherence, and stylistic fluency (Chung, 2020). While these technologies have dramatically increased the speed and accessibility of cross-linguistic communication, their outputs remain shaped by algorithmic gatekeeping. The datasets, model architectures, and reinforcement parameters guiding AI translation introduce new layers of mediation that are neither neutral nor

free from ideological bias. As Zong (2018) and Alafnan (2024) note, human translators remain indispensable for ensuring cultural and ethical accountability in translation practice, a concern that becomes even more pronounced when the “translator” is an algorithm. Recent empirical studies have demonstrated that models such as GPT-4 achieve translation accuracy and fluency approaching human-level performance (Jiao et al., 2023). Moreover, emerging developments in self-evaluative and error-detection mechanisms allow these systems to perform autonomous quality assessment with increasing sophistication (Lu et al., 2023). Yet, despite such technological advancement, AI translation tools operate within the boundaries set by programmers, corpora, and design philosophies making them modern gatekeepers of knowledge circulation and cultural representation. In the context of this study, AI translation is not treated merely as a linguistic tool but as a digital epistemological agent that mediates historical meaning. During the colonial era, the newspapers became a strategic apparatus for managing imperial narratives. Asseraf’s (2022) account of Messaoud Djebari demonstrates how colonial intermediaries could manipulate news production, exposing the press’s susceptibility to political agendas and personal ambitions. Similarly, Bajagić (2020) shows that *Le Petit Parisien*’s 1917 coverage of Serbia glorified military heroism while suppressing civilian suffering illustrating selective reporting as a form of narrative control. Under Nazi occupation, these dynamics intensified. Johnson (2020) notes how censorship and propaganda dominated the press, yet resistance publications like *Défense de la France* reasserted journalism’s moral responsibility to truth and democracy, often at great personal risk (Gildea, 2015).

Despite the technological advances that followed from print to radio, television, and digital media, Mayssa (2020) argues that French journalism remained constrained by governmental oversight. Persistent censorship and regulation cultivated public scepticism, even as media innovation expanded. This pattern underscores the historical gatekeeping role of the press in constructing political consciousness and collective memory. Across Europe, numerous studies have examined how political, cultural, and editorial factors shape transnational discourse. Alarcón (2010) found that media narratives surrounding the European Union varied according to each nation’s political orientation, privileging national over supranational identity. Similarly, Gioltzidou et al. (2023) revealed how editorial intentionality and cultural filters produced distinct national framings of EU issues, while Schuck and De Vreese (2006) demonstrated that framing strategies could influence public sentiment, echoing mechanisms found in colonial media. Mayssa (2020) highlights how mass communication in democratic societies has long been shaped by state policy and technological innovation yet often constrained by censorship. Asseraf’s (2022) analysis of Messaoud Djebari’s manipulation of colonial news reveals how intermediaries could influence narratives beyond their immediate geographies. Bajagić’s (2020) examination of *Le Petit Parisien* demonstrates selective war reporting as an ideological act, while Johnson (2020) and Gildea (2015) document journalistic resistance under Nazi rule as a reclaiming of truth and identity.

Although these studies illuminate press dynamics and colonial influence, they do not address how such historical representations might be reinterpreted through 21st-century AI translation. This study extends their insights by analysing how AI-assisted translation mediates the ideological layers of French depictions of Malaya, revealing how digital interpretation tools participate in the ongoing negotiation between colonial memory and postcolonial understanding.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design that integrates historical discourse analysis with 21st-century AI-assisted translation technologies to investigate how Malaya was represented in French newspapers between 1936 and 1941, and how those representations are reinterpreted through digital translation in the present day. The approach is interdisciplinary, combining insights from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), semiotics, postcolonial theory, and to examine how colonial discourses of Malaya were linguistically and visually constructed, and how they are now recontextualised by artificial intelligence in the 21st century.

The process involved data mining for evidence of French newspaper that were available online according to the timeframe of this study. In the online search that was conducted, the only articles that emerged that were connected to the scope of this study were found in *Paris Soir*. While other digital articles came up, these were published in more recent years, and they were outside the timeframe of this study. While there may be other newspapers in the French archive located in France, current geopolitical tensions and logistical constraints limit extended on-site work in France. As such, this paper functions as a preliminary investigation into the linguistic and sociocultural shifts represented in the available French press. The primary data consists of archived newspaper articles, *Paris Soir*, published in France between 1936 and 1941. The selection of this time frame corresponds with key political moments, including the rise of colonial empire, World War II, and early post-war decolonisation debates. These events are critical in shaping media narratives about Southeast Asia, especially Malaya. Archival sources were drawn online and from the French national library, *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*. The illustrations, photographs, and headline designs will also be included for semiotic analysis. The sampling strategy was purposive and theoretical, prioritising articles that reference Malaysia, Malaya, or the broader Southeast Asian region, particularly those with colonial, economic, cultural, or political content. Representation theory (Stuart Hall, 1997) allows for a nuanced understanding of how images, narratives, and discourses of Malaysia were shaped and circulated, revealing the symbolic and ideological dimensions embedded in these portrayals.

The data analysis process for this study was conducted in several systematic stages to examine how Malaya was represented in French newspapers between 1936 and 1941. The first stage involved archival data mining and coding following the methodological framework established by Pillai (2025). Pillai's framework adopted a multilayered process of retrieving data by accounting for the complex cross-border shifts in both linguistic and sociocultural landscapes that define historical construction. While Pillai (2025) originally applied this framework to the context of French missionary representations of Catholic communities of Malaya, it is utilized here to examine the representation of Malaya within the French colonial press.

This study began by compiling a working list of geographical and colonial code words used within French newspaper archives. Initial search terms such as "Singapour," "Penang," and "Malacca" were gradually expanded as the researchers encountered alternative spellings, colonial terminologies, and regionally coded references including "*la presque malaise*". Similar to Pillai's (2025) observation that colonial archives often transformed local names through Orientalist and European linguistic conventions, this study found that French newspapers frequently represented Malaya through altered geographical labels and colonial descriptors. As a result, the coding process remained iterative throughout the research, allowing new keywords, themes, and discursive patterns to emerge during repeated readings of the archival materials.

After the articles were selected, the second stage involved textual and ideological analysis. Each newspaper article was closely read to identify recurring narratives, rhetorical strategies, lexical choices, and ideological assumptions surrounding Malaya and Southeast Asia. Particular attention was given to how the newspapers framed themes such as colonial order, economic exploitation, exoticism, modernity, and geopolitical instability. Since the archival materials were originally written in French, the texts were first translated using AI-assisted translation tools to facilitate systematic reading and coding. However, the translated outputs were subsequently checked and interpreted manually to identify semantic shifts, culturally embedded meanings, and colonial nuances that may have been altered through machine translation. This process enabled the researcher to critically compare the original French discourse with its translated English rendering rather than relying solely on automated translation outputs.

The third stage focused on visual and symbolic analysis. Non-textual elements including headlines, newspaper layouts, illustrations, typography, and image placement were examined to understand how visual structures reinforced the ideological framing of Malaya within the newspapers. The study analysed how symbolic representations worked together with written discourse to construct meanings associated with colonial authority, civilisation, danger, or exoticism. In addition, the research also considered the institutional and editorial context behind the production of these newspapers. Editorial priorities, journalistic conventions, colonial influence, and the political climate of pre-war France were analysed to understand why certain narratives about Malaya were amplified while others were marginalised or excluded.

Finally, the findings from the textual, visual, and institutional analyses were synthesised to evaluate how French media representations contributed to collective memory formation. By tracing recurring representations and ideological patterns across multiple newspaper articles, the study assessed how French media participated in constructing long-term Western perceptions of Malaya and Southeast Asia. This final analytical stage enabled the research to connect individual newspaper texts to broader questions of colonial discourse, historical imagination, and memory-making within French media narratives.

TABLE 1. below shows the geographical and colonial code words used:

Articles	Français	English
<i>Paris Soir</i> , 3rd September 1936	..... <i>commencé dans le port de Singapour</i> .....	.....begun in the port of Singapore....
<i>Paris Soir</i> , 4th October 1936	..... <i>la presque île malaise</i> .....	.....the Malay Peninsular.....
<i>Paris-Soir</i> , 9th October 1936	..... <i>atterri à Singapour</i>	..... arrived in Singapore
<i>Paris Soir</i> , 12th October 1936	... <i>mais pas l'aéroport de Penang</i> ...	..... Penang airport.....

Westphal (2021) further connects representation to epistemological and perceptual debates, arguing that the topics Kant (1787) discusses in the "*Deduction*" are closely related to discussions on self-consciousness, self-ascription, and perceptual judgment. Gatekeeping theory (Kurt Lewin, 1947; David Manning White, 1950; Pamela Shoemaker, 2001), on the other hand, emphasizes the power structures and institutional forces that determined which narratives were privileged or silenced. Together, these frameworks offer a comprehensive lens to interrogate the mechanisms through which French media and literary production shaped collective memory and perceptions of Malaysia, thereby highlighting the complex interplay of power, identity, and historical narratives. This combined approach not only deepens our understanding of the historical construction of Malaysia in the French imagination but also sheds light on the broader processes of knowledge production and cultural hegemony.

This study is grounded in an integrated theoretical framework that draws on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Representation Theory, Gatekeeping Theory, and Memory Studies. As illustrated in Diagram 1, these four frameworks are interrelated, providing a comprehensive structure for analysing how Malaya was represented in French newspapers and how these representations continue to shape collective memory through 21st-century AI translation. At the core of this framework lies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which serves as the principal analytical tool. The goal of CDA is to demonstrate how language has the ability to shape or alter people's perceptions of the world around them (Dezhkameh et al., 2021). Hence, CDA allows the study to systematically examine how language, power, and ideology interact in the construction of colonial discourse. It provides textual meaning within broader socio-political contexts, revealing how colonial hierarchies were naturalised through French media. Branching from CDA, Representation Theory, informed by semiotic analysis, provides a conceptual lens for understanding how meanings about Malaya were visually and textually encoded, negotiated, and circulated. It emphasises that representations are not neutral reflections of reality but are ideologically charged constructs shaped by colonials. Through this lens, the study explores how French media transformed Malaya into a symbolic site of colonial imagination and imperial desire.

Gatekeeping Theory complements these insights by addressing the institutional and editorial processes that governed which narratives were published and which were excluded. This framework highlights the agency of editors, translators, and journalists in mediating colonial discourse, underscoring how power and control over information shaped the visibility of certain perspectives while silencing others. Finally, Memory Studies enables an understanding of how colonial representations of Malaya persist beyond their original historical context, influencing contemporary perceptions through the digital re-mediations of 21st-century AI translation tools. Collectively, these frameworks demonstrate that representations of Malaya were not static or objective accounts, but dynamic discursive constructions shaped by ideology, institutional control, and collective remembrance. This theoretical grounding provides a robust foundation for examining how colonial narratives are continuously reproduced, reinterpreted, and transmitted across linguistic, cultural, and technological boundaries.

Discourse, in this context, refers to structured systems of meaning through which knowledge about Malaysia is constructed and communicated. The research draws on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly the work of Fairclough (1989) and Van Dijk (1993), to unpack the lexical choices, metaphors, and thematic structures that French newspapers used when covering Malaysia. This lens is instrumental in revealing how colonial or orientalist perspectives may have been embedded in seemingly neutral journalistic language.

Complementing the discourse approach is a semiotic analysis of visual and symbolic representations. Using concepts from Barthes (1964) and Chandler (2002), the research examines how Malaysia is portrayed through images, headlines, layouts, and other visual codes. These elements carry both denotative and connotative meanings and contribute to a broader media mythology surrounding Southeast Asia. This component investigates how images of Malaysia whether depicting political leaders, rural landscapes, or cultural practices contribute to particular ideological framings.

The final pillar of this dimension is ideology, which undergirds both discourse and semiotics. Ideology is treated as the tacit system of beliefs and values that structure representation. Drawing on the work of Althusser (1971) and Hall (1997), the analysis seeks to uncover how French media's portrayals of Malaya may have reflected broader colonial ideologies. This includes examining binary oppositions such as developed or developing aspects, and how this influenced

public perception of French about Malaysia. To fully understand how representations are constructed, it is also necessary to analyse the institutional and social mechanisms that mediate news production. The first concept in this second dimension is that of actors—the individuals and organizations involved in shaping the narrative. These include journalists, foreign correspondents, editors, and media owners, each bringing their own assumptions, experiences, and constraints to the representation process. Their positionality, geopolitical location, and institutional affiliations play a crucial role in determining how Malaya was framed.

The concept of filtering refers to the selection, prioritization, and exclusion of news content. Borrowing from gatekeeping theory (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996), this component interrogates how certain events or perspectives are privileged over others. In this context, it is important to ask: What kinds of stories about Malaya were published, and what was left out? What editorial guidelines, political pressures, or audience expectations influenced these decisions? Finally, the process of news production is examined as a broader system encompassing routines, editorial policies, historical context, and international relations. It recognizes that media content is not created in a vacuum but shaped by external factors such as colonial history or bilateral relations between France and Malaysia. This part of the framework draws on the use of language and media elements to map the structural influences that affect representation.

In order to address the research questions systematically, this study employs a structured process of selection, elimination, and coding of archival French newspaper materials from 1936 to 1941. Articles were retrieved using recurring geographical keywords “Singapore,” “Penang,” and “Malacca” which served as primary entry points due to their prominence in French reporting and their association with Malaya’s strategic, economic, and geopolitical significance within the British colonial system. Inclusion was determined by the presence of substantive references to Malaya’s economy, society, or political context, while newspapers were selected on the basis of national circulation, archival availability, and the frequency of reporting on Southeast Asia during the period under study. Retrieved articles were then organised chronologically and coded thematically using analytical lenses of representation and gatekeeping to examine patterns of editorial selection, narrative emphasis, and framing strategies over time.

These methodological decisions are not neutral, but form part of the analytical process through which representations of Malaya are rendered visible and comparable. While the full procedural rationale is elaborated in the methodology section, the operational definitions that follow clarify how key concepts and analytical categories are understood and applied throughout the study, thereby providing a coherent foundation for subsequent analysis.

Having established the methodological framework, selection criteria, and operational definitions in this study, the analysis now turns to the empirical examination of French newspaper representations of Malaya. Drawing on the coded corpus of articles retrieved through AI-assisted translation, the following section analyses how Malaya was framed across economic, social, and geopolitical dimensions between 1936 and 1941. Particular attention is paid to recurring narrative patterns, editorial emphases, and omissions, as well as to the role of gatekeepers in shaping which aspects of Malaya were rendered visible to French audiences.

## FRENCH NEWSPAPER ANALYSIS

This analysis is organised around the three research questions. First, it examines how French newspapers (1936–1941) report on the economic activities and colonial trade networks of Malaya? Secondly, in what ways were French newspaper depictions of Malaya (1936–1941) influenced by broader geopolitical tensions and wartime developments? Lastly, how does AI translation facilitate the identification and interpretation of gatekeeping mechanisms in these representations? Through this analysis, the study demonstrates how colonial meanings were produced, circulated, and rearticulated within the French newspapers, and how these representations are mediated through contemporary translation technologies.

Artificial intelligence (AI) has become a valuable tool for making French-language texts easier to access, especially when working with large archival or historical corpora. AI aids in the identification of French texts' literal meanings, grammatical structures, historical terminology, and contextual subtleties. According to Okoye and Tidjani (2025), AI-driven translation tools also increase vocabulary by offering contextual definitions and phrases. In this sense, AI lowers the linguistic barrier, simplify the reading and navigation of complex or specialised documents. Instead of replacing the researcher's interpretive role, AI mostly acts as a mediation tool that facilitates understanding and interaction with foreign-language content.

Furthermore, AI can support textual analysis by assisting researchers in identifying recurrent themes, keyword frequency, semantic patterns, sentiment, framing devices, and colonial or ideological language across large datasets. AI also help identify repeated references and associations related to locations like “*Malacca*”, “*Penang*” and “*Singapour*” including how these places were framed within discussions of trade, colonial administration, mobility, or strategic importance. This facilitates preliminary coding and thematic categorisation prior to deeper qualitative interpretation.

As a result, AI can work as an analytical aid that makes access and organization easier. However, CDA scholars contend that discourse actively constructs social relationships (Fairclough, 1992; Luke, 2002). Particularly in academic and professional contexts, the growing dependence on AI for translation raises concerns about its limitations and accuracy. Although AI translation systems have significantly improved foreign language tools, human oversight is still necessary to assure accuracy, according to Klimova and Pikhart (2023). This interpretive layer becomes evident in French aviation-related reporting, which highlights how Singapore's infrastructure was framed in early twentieth-century media discourse. For example, an excerpt from *Paris-Soir* titled *Le Courrier des Ailes* (3 September 1936, Figure 1) reports that work had begun on the port of Singapore on a development that includes 1,600 metres of quays in preparation for new four-engine aircraft.

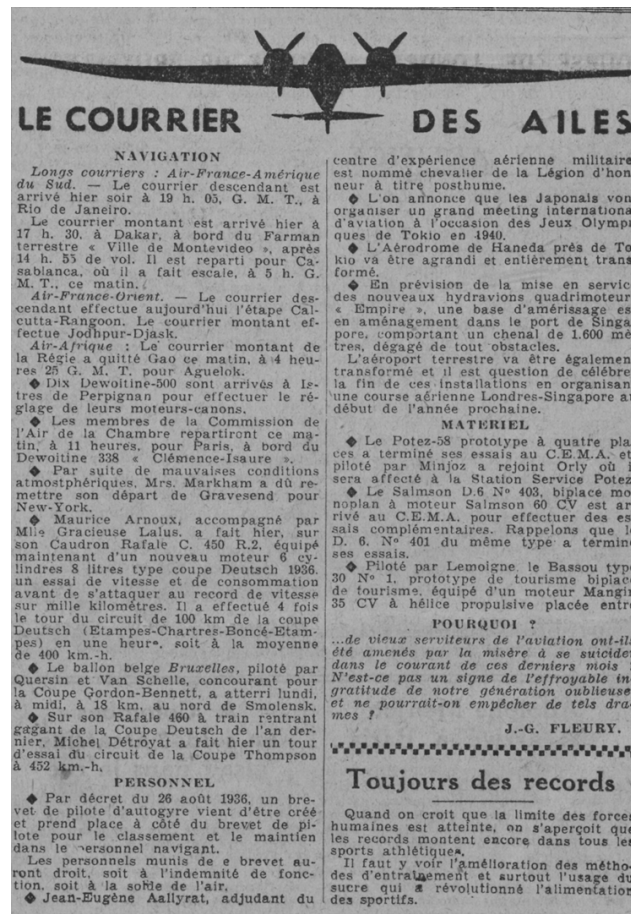


FIGURE 1. Headline: *Le Courrier des Ailes* (The Aviation Courier), Paris Soir, 1936

As quoted in French, “*En prévision de la mise en service des nouveaux avions quadrimoteurs, on a commencé dans le port de Singapour, un aménagement comprenant 1.600 mètres de quais*”. The reference to four-engine aircraft indicates the arrival of a new generation of long-haul planes capable of intercontinental flight, which demanded significant ground and sea support infrastructure. Singapore’s position at the crossroads of major colonial and commercial routes made it an ideal site for such expansion.

The project described aligns with broader British colonial efforts to develop Singapore as a strategic aviation and naval hub, connecting Europe, the Middle East, India, and the Far East. The passage suggests that the French newspapers framed Singapore in largely positive economic terms, focusing on prosperity and growth.

This also notes that Paris-Soir presents Singapore primarily through an economic lens, reflecting metropolitan interest in the commercial networks of Southeast Asia. Overall, the tone is formal and analytical. The coverage does not express personal opinion but rather reports on the strategic importance of the colony. This reflects a detached, third-person style: the newspaper’s words are quoted and then interpreted objectively.

The imagery of ships and harbour in Figure 2 complements the textual description by visually reinforcing the theme of trade and colonial infrastructure.

**Chemin sans issue**

GRAND Récit D'AMOUR et D'AVENTURES de  
**GEORGES SIMENON**

ILLUSTRATIONS DE  
**HERVÉ BAILLE**



Deux avions tournoient sur la fin...

**RESUME**  
Un yacht de plaisance, l'Éclair, est saisi à Saint-Jean, sur la côte d'Azur. Le propriétaire, Jeanne Papelier, se divarqua furieusement sur le malfrance de l'éclair, capable de voler, avec lequel elle s'enfuit fréquemment.

Une fois en mer, Jeanne Papelier regagna de nombreux amis. Un bruit de son retour se répandit et elle-même se lança dans la recherche dans les chambres de ses invités, et dans les cabines de l'Éclair. Elle le retrouva dans celle de capitaine de bord, Hilda.

Hilda est ravagée malgré ses dénégations. Vladimir avait alors à sa main et l'avait caché dans le coffre de Hilda.

IV  
Les cloches sonnaient toujours. La cloche bleue du ciel devenait elle-même une cloche sous laquelle s'écroulaient les deux avions lachement. Vladimir, en passant, vit qu'Hilda était levée et qu'elle paraissait son café sur le réchaud installé sur la table du salon. Elle était

lente qui, petit à petit, l'imprégnait de réverie.

Non ! N'avait bronché ! N'était-ce pas inouï ! Il se souvint d'être rentré à bord le premier soir, et d'avoir été en train à peine dormait ! Elle était là, dans l'ombre, derrière le balcon ouvert. Dans doute l'avait-elle entendue franchir la passerelle ! Et elle avait quelle était seule avec lui dans le bateau, de son côté, dans le poste.

dans son cabinet même, la porte ouverte. A eux deux, ils pourraient se charger d'entretenir le yacht.

— Et la cuisine ? protesta Polyte. C'est Tony qui fait la cuisine ?

— Voilà à quoi cela se réduisait. Il y avait de même avec Jeanne Papelier qui arriva en auto vers onze heures, en compagnie de Jojo, car elle n'avait plus qu'elle. Oh comment le déjeuner, chez Polyte. Pendant que Vladimir et Jojo restaient sur le pont, Jeanne descendit parler à sa fille et longtemps on entendit chuchoter.

Plus Vladimir fut appelé. La mère et la fille étaient assises de chaque côté de la table.

— Écoutez, Vladimir...

— Elle ne veut rien entendre pour venir à la maison. Elle ne veut pas non plus que j'engage, quelque peu, pour faire la cuisine à bord.

Jeanne était dans ses bons jours. Elle n'avait pas l'air de s'être dévouée à elle-même. Elle avait l'air d'être d'une femme d'affaires.

— C'est pas pour elle ! Seulement il faut quand même entretenir l'Éclair...

On discutait. On discutait en fin de compte que le mécanicien Tony, qui n'était pas très sûr, ne devait pas être de l'entretien et du nettoyage et que Vladimir traiterait avec un réparateur à la villa, soit chez Polyte, selon les jours.

On ne parla pas de Hilda. Jeanne l'avait déjà oubliée. Pour se distraire, elle allait à une vente de bijoux qui avait lieu à Monte-Carlo et, après le déjeuner, la voiture l'emportait avec Jojo.

Maintenant, Hilda était installée sur le pont, tout à l'arrière, dans son fauteuil rotatif, et elle regardait, sans voir Vladimir que le rocif lui charrait. Les courants commençaient à ébranler la jete. Des gens contemplaient le yacht avec envie, émettaient des réflexions stupides.

Vladimir ne savait même pas quelle vie avait menée jusqu'à la jeune fille. Tout au plus avait-il compris qu'elle était née du premier mariage de Jeanne Papelier. Mais était-ce du mariage avec celui qui était devenu ministre.

— Probablement non. Il y avait eu un mariage précédent, un mariage plus obscur, dont elle se parlait jamais.

— Était-il possible d'être plus fatiguée que Jeanne et Vladimir ? Presque ensemble. Deux ou trois fois par semaine ils dormaient dans le même lit. Jeanne ne se donnait pas la peine de cacher en Russie la facture de ses cheveux et il lui arrivait d'être malade devant lui.

Chacun connaissait les moindres vices de l'autre, et ils mettaient en commun toutes leurs petites lâchetés.

N'importe que Vladimir n'aurait pas osé demander :

— Pourquoi Hilda est-elle venue soudain vivre avec vous ?

Et Jeanne n'en parlait pas non plus. Il y avait aussi des choses réservées dans leur vie.

Ainsi Jeanne Papelier, de son côté, n'avait pas osé écrire les raisons pour lesquelles Vladimir avait quitté son mari. Il y avait eu des jours de cela et elle n'en avait pas écrit une seule fois. C'était fini ! C'était un fait acquis ! Hilda était supportable. C'est tout juste si le lundi, Vladimir avait osé demander en rougissant :

— Vous avez dit la vérité à Hilda ?

— Elle avait répondu :

— Pour qui me prends-tu ?

Le soleil perçait la toile de son bonnet blanc. Il se sentait la cuisine sur ses poitrinaires. Son corps s'engourdissement et même la dégré du pont sur lequel il était couché arrivait à lui procurer une sensation voluptueuse.

Hilda était à quelques mètres de lui. C'était toujours Polyte dans le ciel et sur la terre. Jusqu'aux bruits qui étaient des bruits de fête et non des bruits de tous les jours.

Comment aurait-il pu exprimer ce qu'il ressentait ? C'était à la fois exaltant et désespérant. Elle était là. Il était là. Il connaissait le terre qu'elle habitait, un roman dont l'action se déroulait en Malaisie. De temps en temps, elle tournait la page et il en arrivait à quitter le crépuscule du passé.

(La suite...)

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**L'ECOSSE**  
pour des vacances tardives

N'avez-vous jamais songé à visiter l'Écosse en septembre, à l'époque où les papavillons commencent à voler ? L'Écosse est un pays merveilleux, surtout à l'époque où les papavillons commencent à voler. On peut y aller à l'époque où les papavillons commencent à voler. On peut y aller à l'époque où les papavillons commencent à voler. On peut y aller à l'époque où les papavillons commencent à voler.

Le gérant : DESPLANCHES

Imprimeur : P. R. M. L. L.

Mars 1936

FIGURE 2. Headline: *Chemin Sans Issue* (Dead-End Road), a serial novel by Georges Simenon, Paris Soir, 1936

The aviation theme continues with coverage of pioneering flights. A 5 Oct 1936 *Paris-Soir* article (Figure 3) outlines Jean Batten's planned route for her London–New Zealand flight.



FIGURE 3. Headline: *Demain, Jean Batten va tenter Londres–Nouvelle-Zélande* (Tomorrow, Jean Batten will attempt the London–New Zealand Flight), *Paris Soir*, 1936

This excerpt (figure 3) outlines a portion of Jean Batten's planned route for her ambitious London–New Zealand solo flight in October 1936. The line tracing Rangoon–Singapore–Batavia–Kupang–Darwin highlights the strategic role of the Malay Peninsula and Singapore within the global network of long-distance aviation routes during the interwar years. By referring specifically to “*la presqu'île malaise*” (the Malay Peninsula) and Singapore, the article situates British Malaya as a key aerial corridor linking South Asia to the Dutch East Indies and onward to Australia. This choice of route reflects the imperial geography of air travel at the time colonial territories provided the necessary infrastructure for European aviators to traverse vast distances between continents.

Original Text: “*Puis, je compte, de là, descendre vers le Sud-Quest, le long de la presqu'île malaise, de Rangoon à Singapour et de là à Batavia et à Kupang, d'où je gagnerai directement Darwin.*”

English Translation: “Then, from there, I plan to head southeast, along the Malay Peninsula, from Rangoon to Singapore, and from there to Batavia and Kupang, from where I will fly directly to Darwin.”

Jean Batten’s mention of flying “along the Malay Peninsula, from Rangoon to Singapore” underscores Singapore’s established importance as an aviation refuelling and rest point, while also acknowledging the geopolitical unity of Malaya as an imperial thoroughfare. Singapore’s position at the southern tip of the peninsula made it a natural gateway between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific routes, both maritime and aerial. This statement is particularly significant when read alongside contemporaneous reports of aviation expansion in Singapore, such as the construction of new port and aerodrome facilities. Together, these accounts illustrate how Malaya and Singapore were embedded within the narrative of modern aviation progress, serving as both practical stopovers and symbols of technological achievement under colonial modernity. Batten’s route, and the way it was presented in *Le Courrier des Ailes*, reinforces how colonial territories in Southeast Asia were romanticised as stepping-stones of modernity. The French press framed her journey not only as a feat of endurance but also as a celebration of the global reach of aviation, one that implicitly depended on colonial infrastructures. Thus, Malaya and Singapore appear in the text as geographical constants of empire, marking the midpoint between the European metropole and the Australasian frontier. Their inclusion signifies both technological interconnection and imperial continuity, revealing how aviation journalism of the 1930s intertwined narratives of exploration, empire, and progress.



FIGURE 4. Headline: *Jean Batten a atterri à Singapour* (Jean Batten has landed in Singapore), *Paris Soir*, 1936

In *Paris-Soir*'s 9 Oct 1936 dispatch of Batten’s stopover (Figure 4), the headline simply states, “*Jean Batten a atterri à Singapour*” (English translation: “Jean Batten has landed in Singapore”). The article provides only core facts: her arrival, the reason for the delay (a mechanical repair), and her next destination. Notably, the detail “her aircraft needs repair” is included. This technical note introduces humanizing vulnerability into the coverage. The text identifies Batten as “L’aviatrice néo-zélandaise” (“the New Zealand aviator”), emphasizing her professional skill. By framing her achievement in technical terms, the newspaper expanded the narrative of women’s capabilities. However, the mention of the mechanical setback subtly aligns with traditional gendered narratives of fragility, as if to balance the celebration with a reminder of dependency on machinery.

# Jean Batten nous câble...

Port Darwin, 12 Octobre. (Par câble.)  
J'ai toujours estimé que les derniers moments d'un long raid sont les plus.  
Avec quelle intensité j'ai éprouvé cette vérité à l'instant où, la gorge serrée par la peur, j'essayais d'atterrir, avec le record Anglière-Australie si près de moi que je croyais le toucher.  
Je ressentis une fâcheuse impression lorsque je m'aperçus que je n'arrivais pas à descendre. L'avion marchait à grande vitesse et je ne parvenais pas à la réduire. A ma première tentative d'atterrissage les roues se touchèrent même pas le sol. Le hangar de l'aérodrome semblait avancer sur moi, menaçant. Je dus remettre les gaz, reprendre de la hauteur, puis faire une deuxième tentative d'atterrissage. Cette fois je réussis, mais de justesse. Mon frein se bloqua et l'avion fit un tour sur lui-même sans capoter heureusement.  
Quoi qu'il en soit, la foule qui m'attendait avait eu une sérieuse émotion. Quant à moi, ce qui m'occupait, n'était de penser que le record m'appartenait. Mais j'ai payé cher ma victoire. J'ai échappé plusieurs fois d'un cheveu à la mort. J'ai eu à lutter contre des tempêtes de sable au-dessus de la Perse ; d'horribles moustiques m'ont assailli au-dessus des Indes. Et durant tout le parcours, j'ai subi une terrible chaleur. Mais le pire incident, ce fut lorsque, dans la nuit, je quittai Akayab, en Birmanie.  
Je m'aperçus que la porte de ma carlingue s'était ouverte. J'essayai à plusieurs reprises de la claquer, mais sans y réussir. Je dus alors la maintenir fermée avec la main pendant plus de 9 heures, jusqu'à mon arrivée à Penang, en Malaisie, de peur que la porte ne fût arrachée par le vent. Le jour se levait lorsque je traversais les Hautes-Montagnes. A ce moment, la pluie se mit à tomber. Je dus monter jusqu'à 3000 mètres, volant au-dessus des nuages jusqu'à Raagon.  
Mais l'aérodrome était inondé et je dus changer de direction et partir pour Victoria Point. Il commença alors à tomber de la grêle. Je continuai néanmoins et l'on m'entendit certainement passer au-dessus de l'aérodrome. Je traversais le Siam car je ne voulais pas voler au-dessus de l'aérodrome des Hautes-Montagnes. La pluie tombait toujours terriblement lourde et arrivaient que je n'arrive à Alor-Star. Le temps était un des plus mauvais que j'aie jamais rencontrés au cours de ma carrière de victorieux.  
Le vent était tellement fort que je descendais de plus en plus bas jusqu'à environ une vingtaine de mètres du sol. Je vis au-dessus de moi une côte que je pensais être la côte malaise. J'avais l'impression que j'étais à proximité de Alor-Star, lorsque soudain je vis à une très courte distance, en plein devant moi, la base d'une énorme montagne. Je réussis tout juste à tourner autour et d'essence en route pour Ranbang d'une seule traite. Alors que je roulais sur l'aérodrome, une de mes ailes heurta deux personnes de la foule, les jetant à terre. Heureusement, elles ne furent pas blessées.  
La nuit était sombre et je me sentais inquiet d'avoir à voler au-dessus de la mer par un pareil temps. La lune n'apparaissait pas. Je j'ai dû rester cherché en vain tout autour du monde. Je ne pouvais apercevoir l'horizon et je voyais des éclairs devant moi.  
Je décidai alors de voler très haut et m'élevai jusqu'à 3000 mètres, volant au-dessus des nuages.  
Au-dessus de Sumatra, je tombai dans la tempête et je dus voler sous une pluie torrennelle. Il faisait nuit noire. Je volai absolument à l'aveuglette pendant une heure, lorsque tout à coup, par un trou de nuage, j'aperçus le haut d'un phare, juste au moment où, vaincu par le sommeil, j'allais m'endormir. La tempête cessa à 4 heures du matin et j'eus la joie de me retrouver au-dessus des lumières de Batavia. Après ces épreuves, jamais une ville ne m'avait semblé si magnifique et je changeai alors de direction et mis le cap sur Sourabaya. Je dus voler de nouveau au-dessus des Hautes Montagnes et passai Sourab à la lueur du jour. Mais il me semblait qu'il y avait quelque chose d'extraordinaire. Je n'allais pas dans ma jungle à essence et je m'aperçus qu'en réalité un des deux réservoirs était absolument vide. Le vent debout et des tronc d'air me moquèrent la vie dure, mais d'un autre côté, ils m'obligèrent à me tenir éveillés et je savais maintenant que j'aurais bientôt à atterrir. J'atteignis Ranbang après 2100 kilomètres de vol depuis Singapour. Une fois à terre, je n'eus aucun mal à trouver un hôtel. Je n'eus aucun mal à trouver un hôtel. Je n'eus aucun mal à trouver un hôtel. Je n'eus aucun mal à trouver un hôtel.  
Un revolver, un réveille-matin  
Je pense que si j'ai réussi mon exploit, c'est parce que je l'ai préparé avec le plus grand soin, ne négligeant aucun détail, et c'est fait de ce côté déjà la route m'a évidemment aidé. J'avais avec moi un revolver. Il m'a attiré des ennemis aux Indes où je dus demander une licence spéciale pour avoir le revolver avec moi. J'avais aussi un réveille-matin, un minuscule sac contenant des effets personnels et quelques sacs d'argent, contenant des pièces des différents pays orientaux que j'avais à envoyer composaient tous mes bagages.  
Ma dernière traversée de la mer de Timor jusqu'à Port-Darwin ce matin n'a duré que 3 heures 50. Lorsque j'avais effectué la même traversée en 1929, sur un monoplane Moit, j'avais mis huit heures.  
Comme vous le voyez, j'ai fait des progrès.  
Paris-Soir Copyright 1936 by Paris-Soir and Jean Batten.  
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FIGURE 5. Headline: *Jean Batten nous câble* (Jean Batten sends a telegram), Paris Soir, 1936

An excerpt on 12 October 1936 (figure 5) reads an extensive, first-person narrative from Jean Batten, under the abbreviated headline "*Jean Batten nous câble...*", signifies a strategic editorial decision. The newspaper, acting as the media gatekeeper, prioritised the author's subjective experience over conventional, objective reporting. This choice transformed a high-profile aviation record attempt into a serialized, personalized drama, thereby ensuring sustained reader engagement and maximizing the cultural capital of the event. By passing the aviator's intimate account replete with candid admissions of fear, exhaustion, and technical struggle in which the gatekeeper intentionally selected for narrative drama and emotional valence.

There are two geographical mentions that are highly relevant to and geographically situated within the Malay Peninsula, which historically comprises Malaya:

1. Singapore: Mentioned several times as a key destination.  
Original Text: "...l'arrivée à Singapour au point de débarquement de la péninsule..."  
English Translation: the arrival in Singapore at the peninsula landing site..."  
Original Text: "...J'ai voulu partir après avoir attendu les deux heures de réparation. Je dois voler à 3 000 mètres au-dessus des nuages de Singapour."  
English Translation: I wanted to leave after waiting two hours for repair. I must fly at 3,000 meters above the clouds of Singapore.
2. Penang: Mentioned as a location that was planned but not used.  
Original Text: "...mais pas l'aéroport de Penang que j'avais entendu réparer."  
English Translation: "... but not the Penang airport which I had heard was repaired."

These two locations (Singapore and Penang) are crucial points on the Malay Peninsula, forming part of the historical region of Malaya during the time of Jean Batten's flight. This artifact constructs a complex and powerful image of the female pioneer, moving beyond simple celebration to establish a model of resilient and technically proficient heroism. Batten's narrative is remarkable for its explicit portrayal of vulnerability, where she confesses to feeling fear ("J'ai peur," "terrified of being burned alive") and succumbing to profound physical exhaustion ("J'ai senti que je commençais à payer mon effort").

Critically, this vulnerability is not presented as an impediment to success but as the very crucible from which her courage is forged, redefining heroism as the conscious, intellectual triumph over psychological and physiological distress ("Je me ressaisis," "J'ai dû... reprendre confiance"). Furthermore, the text meticulously details her expertise assessing meteorological conditions, managing fuel consumption, and executing emergency procedures framing her success as a product of calculated technical competence rather than mere luck or romanticized flair. While the central representation is professional, the narrative offers significant insight into the gendered constraints of early aviation.

Batten's repeated struggles with the physical conditions the intense heat in the cockpit, the debilitating exhaustion, and the dependence on repairs for a functioning machine implicitly highlight the challenges faced by women in an environment largely designed by and for men. The need to overcome not only the perils of nature but also the limitations imposed by a technically unforgiving setting adds a layer of complexity to her achievement. This representation simultaneously subverts traditional gender roles by placing a woman at the apex of technical mastery and confirms a subtextual struggle against physical and mechanical limitations.

In sum, the French press consistently constructed Malaya's image through selective emphasis. Singapore (and, to a lesser extent, Penang) is repeatedly portrayed as a critical colonial hub. The editors' choices which events to report and which details to highlight served to normalize a colonial view of Malaya as a productive territory within a global imperial network. Through representation framed Singapore as a crossroads and gatekeeping, presenting only certain types of stories, the press shaped a particular French vision of Southeast Asia. The AI-assisted translations of these articles reveal how such historically mediated narratives are carried forward into the digital age, indicating both continuities and subtle transformations in the transmission of colonial memory.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the construction of Malaya's image in French newspapers during the late 1930s and the early years of the Second World War, while foregrounding the mediating role of contemporary AI translation tools in accessing and interpreting these historical texts. Rather than treating translation as a purely technical or statistical process, the study adopts a qualitative, humanities-oriented approach that situates translation within questions of memory, power, and meaning across time and culture. By analysing *Paris Soir* coverage (1936–1941), the research demonstrates that representation is not only shaped at the moment of news production but is also reconfigured through later translational interventions, creating a transtemporal dialogue between colonial-era discourse and present-day digital technologies.

The findings confirm that gatekeeping and filtering functioned as decisive institutional mechanisms in shaping international discourse about Malaya, even in the absence of direct French colonial control. Editorial decisions consistently privileged stories aligned with metropolitan

economic priorities and geopolitical interests, particularly narratives highlighting aviation achievements, commercial infrastructure, and strategic connectivity. Through these selections, Singapore and the Malay Peninsula were framed as productive, modernising nodes within a broader imperial network. At the same time, filtering operated through systematic exclusion: local political struggles, social conditions, and indigenous perspectives were largely absent. This selective visibility reveals how gatekeeping is not merely about what is published, but about how ideological coherence is maintained through omission, reinforcing dominant colonial logics while silencing alternative realities.

Crucially, the study shows that AI-assisted translation introduces a layer of mediation. Historical language is not simply transferred into another linguistic code; it is processed, normalised, and sometimes neutralised by algorithmic systems trained on contemporary linguistic patterns. In this sense, AI translation functions as a form of digital gatekeeping, shaping how colonial memory is accessed and understood by present-day readers. This challenges dominant, quantitatively driven models of machine translation that prioritise efficiency and accuracy while overlooking cultural nuance, affect, and historical specificity. By bridging theories of representation and gatekeeping with qualitative digital methods, this study demonstrates that the power of colonial discourse lies not only in the original texts but also in the institutional and technological processes that govern their circulation across time.

The findings underscore the need for sustained critical engagement when employing AI tools in historical and humanities research. Translation technologies are not neutral instruments; they are active mediators that participate in the reconstruction of the past. Future research could extend this inquiry beyond the French press to include newspapers from other non-colonial European powers, such as Germany or Italy, to develop a more generalisable model of how metropolitan media outside formal colonial administration nonetheless legitimised imperial knowledge about Southeast Asia. Further studies may also combine qualitative analysis with computational approaches, such as Natural Language Processing and computational linguistics, to measure semantic drift and affective shifts introduced by different large language models when translating historically sensitive texts. Finally, incorporating perspectives from memory studies through analyses of letters to the editor, travel writing, or contemporaneous public debates would close the communicative loop by examining how these mediated representations were received, internalised, or contested within French society itself.

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