

# Keeping The Corridor Open – Clan Associations in Post-Independence Singapore

## 1. Introduction

What stories can we uncover from the pre-war clan associations found along key areas in Chinatown, Singapore? These Chinese clan associations (*huiguan*) found in Chinatown can be traced back to the Raffles Town Plan which designated the south bank of the Singapore River as a Chinese *kampong* (Malay for village). The Town Plan divided the Chinese migrants by their originating province and respective dialect groups since “people from one province are more quarrelsome than another”.<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding these stereotypes, there were unifying elements of the Chinese *huiguan*.

Chinese *huiguan* were generally grouped in two ways - the first was based on where their members came from while the second was based on ties of kinship, with many even sharing the same surname.<sup>2</sup> Philip A. Kuhn, a distinguished Harvard historian of China, described the migrant community as a ‘bilateral organism’ with the destination described as the receiving place and China as the sending society.<sup>3</sup> For Chinese immigrants who arrived in Singapore, *huiguan* played many important roles such as providing housing, helping to find jobs, looking after funeral arrangements, issuing marriage certificates, among other functions.<sup>4</sup>

However, the role of the *huiguan* diminished after Singapore gained independence in 1965. As the Singapore government and its agencies such as Community Centres (CCs) took care of the people’s welfare needs, the relevance of Chinese clan associations came into question. While there were more than 300 registered associations by the 2000’s, many were dormant due to aging leadership, declining membership and concomitant financial difficulties. Such is the context of

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<sup>1</sup> Cangi, Ellen C. "Civilizing the people of Southeast Asia: Sir Stamford Raffles' town plan for Singapore, 1819–23." *Planning Perspective* 8, no. 2 (1993): 166-187.

<sup>2</sup> Yen, Ching Hwang. *Community and politics: The Chinese in colonial Singapore and Malaysia*. Times Academic Press, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Kuhn, Philip A. *Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Singapore. Oral History Department, Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations and Singapore. National Archives. (1986). 《新加坡华人会馆沿革史》 [History of the Chinese clan associations in Singapore] (Vol. 2). 新加坡: 新加坡新闻与出版公司, p. 228.

this paper which seeks to examine how the changing socio-political landscape after 1965 affected the numerous *huiguan* along the two streets of Telok Ayer and Ann Siang Hill.

## 2. Literature Review and Methodology

The literature about overseas Chinese and *huiguan* in Singapore can be broadly classified into three broad categories - that of Chinese migration history, the Chinese diaspora and history of Chinese *huiguan* in Singapore.

Firstly, Wang Gungwu, a renowned historian, and scholar in this field, has written extensively on Chinese migration in Southeast Asia and the political inclination of overseas Chinese in his publications.<sup>5</sup> In his works, Wang proposed four categories of migrants - the 华商 *huashang*, 华工 *huagong*, 华侨 *huaqiao* and lastly, the 华裔. This essay will adopt the narrower definition of “overseas Chinese” (directly translated as 华侨 *huaqiao*) by Wang in a 2013 commentary to refer to those of Chinese descent who have settled down in a variety of countries, specifically in Southeast Asia during the 20th century.<sup>6</sup> Another perspective of the Chinese migration history comes from Kuhn who compared the traditional-style corridors of the emigrants post-1567 and those whom emigrated after China’s 1978 reforms.<sup>7</sup> Kuhn’s analysis of how the corridors have evolved will be applied to the evolution of the *huiguan* in Singapore in the later sections.

Secondly, works related to Chinese diasporas in Southeast Asia (SEA) mostly cover the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For instance, Tracy Barrett examined the Chinese immigrants in Indochina during French colonial rule between 1862 and

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<sup>5</sup> Wang, Gungwu. "The study of Chinese identities in Southeast Asia." *Changing identities of the Southeast Asian Chinese since World War II* (1988): 1-21; Malvezin, Laurent. "The problems with (Chinese) diaspora: an interview with Wang Gungwu." In *Diasporic Chinese Ventures*, pp. 59-70. Routledge, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Wang, Gungwu. "The Potential of the Chinese Diaspora & the Benefits for Southeast Asia." Lkyspp.nus.edu.sg. Accessed March 19, 2022. <https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/gia/article/the-potential-of-the-chinese-diaspora-the-benefits-for-southeast-asia>.

<sup>7</sup> Kuhn, Philip A. *Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2008.

1954.<sup>8</sup> Within this same period, Mark Frost examined the Nanyang commercial and cultural network and the impact it had on redefining the self-perceptions of Chinese migrants in the Straits Settlements.<sup>9</sup> As for the Chinese diaspora identity, Hong Liu and Huimei Zhang's article on Singapore's role as a strategic migration corridor linking the region through a *qiaopi* system (letters written home that accompanied remittances) is directly related to the *huiguan*.<sup>10</sup>

The last category of literature outlines the broad history of Singapore's *huiguan* and examine how specific associations such as the Hokkien and Hakka clan networks in Singapore have changed over time.<sup>11</sup> Most works examine the cultural and religious significance of various clan associations as well as the need to revitalize them.<sup>12</sup> My study is an extension of this category. The *huiguan* remains significant. Here I discuss about how the *huiguan* had to find its place within the larger emerging Singaporean identity and framework of multi-racialism after 1965. My analysis specifically looks at *huiguan* belonging to the Hokkien and Cantonese dialect groups around Telok Ayer and Ann Siang Hill, rather than as a general study.

In terms of methodology, I have consulted several books and publications that touched on the history of overseas Chinese in Singapore. The chosen period is relatively recent, which allowed me to readily obtain copies of clan association magazines and publications. The bulk of my primary sources are from my interviews with the senior clansmen from several Hokkien and Cantonese clan associations. Besides interviews, I visited several of the clans' temples and burial grounds/columbarium e.g., the Thian Hock Keng temple and the 广惠肇碧山亭 Kwong Wai Siu Peck San Theng Heritage Gallery. These provided valuable insight into the history of the various associations and how they had to evolve and adapt to the times.

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<sup>8</sup> Barrett, Tracy C. *The Chinese Diaspora in South-East Asia*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Frost, Mark Ravinder. "Emporium in imperio: Nanyang networks and the Straits Chinese in Singapore, 1819–1914." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 36, no. 1 (2005): 29–66.

<sup>10</sup> Hong Liu, and Huimei Zhang. "Singapore as a nexus of migration corridors: The qiaopi system and diasporic heritage." *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 29, no. 2 (2020): 207–226.

<sup>11</sup> 王力坚. *新加坡客家会馆与文化研究*. Global Publishing, 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Pang, Cheng Lian. "Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations: Revitalising Clan Associations." In *50 Years of the Chinese Community in Singapore*, pp. 29–50. 2016.

### 3. Clan Associations as Corridors in Telok Ayer and Ann Siang Hill in Pre-Independence Singapore

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, *huiguan* in Singapore were essential in helping new immigrants from China settle down through seeking employment and housing. The *huiguan* constituted a migrant corridor that facilitated the travel of migrants and remittances in both directions.<sup>13</sup> It was also an emotional and cultural corridor that connected overseas Chinese back home via lineage rituals, while acting almost like a home away from home. As the overseas Chinese community expanded, the associations “started schools, managed cemeteries and gave financial support to the less privileged clansmen”.<sup>14</sup> In the final phase of the Chinese Civil War, the Hokkiens and Cantonese formed the majority among the dialect groups who arrived in Singapore (Fig 1 below).<sup>15</sup> Their respective clan associations were found mainly along Telok Ayer and Ann Siang Hill.

**Chinese Recipients of Certificates of Admission — 1947-1950**

Dialect-group	August 1947		December 1948		April 1949		February 1950		Total four months	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Hokkien	660	20.7	741	23.3	701	20.0	169	19.0	2,271	21.1
Cantonese	983	28.0	479	15.1	750	21.4	189	21.2	2,311	21.5
Tiuchiu	550	17.3	503	15.8	715	20.4	235	26.4	2,003	18.6
Hainanese	573	17.9	872	27.5	687	19.6	155	17.4	2,287	21.3
Hakka	252	8.0	319	10.0	413	11.8	54	6.1	1,038	9.6
Hokchiu	90	2.8	123	3.9	97	2.8	50	5.6	360	3.3
Hokchhia <sup>n</sup>	10	0.3	41	1.3	14	0.4	7	0.8	72	0.7
Hinghoa	81	2.5	39	1.2	36	1.0	10	1.1	166	1.5
Others	79	2.5	57	1.8	91	2.6	22	2.5	249	2.3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>3,188</b>	<b>99.9</b>	<b>3,174</b>	<b>99.9</b>	<b>3,504</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>891</b>	<b>100.1</b>	<b>10,757</b>	<b>99.9</b>

Fig 1.

<sup>13</sup> Kuhn, Philip A. *Chinese Among Others: Emigration in Modern Times*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> 新加坡宗乡会馆史略 *Xinjiapo Zong Xiang Hui Guan Shi Lue = History of Clan Associations in Singapore*. Singapore, Singapore: 新加坡宗乡会馆联合总会, 2005.

<sup>15</sup> Freedman, Maurice. "A Note on the Stability of the Chinese Population in Singapore, 1947-50." *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 31, no. 1 (181 (1958): 83-93.

Telok Ayer, which translates to “bay” and “water”, was a landing point for immigrants. Temples and burial grounds served as rallying points as well as power bases for early Chinese immigrants and Thian Hock Keng was the “iconic power base for the Hokkien *bang*”.<sup>16</sup> In the interwar period of the 1920s and 1930s, the Chinese immigrants looked to the Hokkien *huiguan* to sponsor Chinese vernacular schools.<sup>17</sup> Beyond being a center of power of the Hokkiens, the temple functioned as a spiritual corridor and the presence of recognisable deities, rituals and spiritual mediums facilitated this. Both *huiguan* and temples served as pillars of an information corridor and functioned as “focal spaces for regional exchanges of knowledge in a largely pre-print world”.<sup>18</sup> Among the immigrants who came from Guangzhou and its neighbouring counties and cities, the Cantonese formed the vast majority. Guangdong-affiliated associations based on dialects other than Cantonese, such as Hakka, Teochew, and Cantonese/Hakka, were also set up.<sup>19</sup> It was along Ann Siang Hill where several of the Cantonese dialect groups founded clan associations based on their geographical origins or kinship ties.

#### 4. Dormant Corridors after the 1960s - An Existentialist Crisis for Clan Associations

As more of the overseas Chinese sank roots in Singapore, the original role of the *huiguan* as migrant and cultural corridors diminished. In this section, I will assess how the changing socio-political environment in Singapore after the 1950’s and 1960’s affected some of the clan associations in Telok Ayer and Ann Siang Hill.

As with most *huiguan* in the early 20th century, the Hokkien and Cantonese migrant associations along Telok Ayer and Ann Siang Hill were founded to serve a community and social welfare function for immigrants arriving from the same locality or kinship group.<sup>20</sup> For example,

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 117. *Bang* refers to the intra-and inter-dialect group relationships that included the management of temples and burial grounds, kinship clan associations, occupational organisations and social groups. [Useful note explaining the importance of Bang in Singapore-Malaya(sia) socio-political landscape.]

<sup>17</sup> Gan, Josephine. Secretary General of the Hokkien *huiguan*. Interview by Clara Khoo. 21 Mar 2022.

<sup>18</sup> Frost, Mark Ravinder. "Emporium in imperio: Nanyang networks and the Straits Chinese in Singapore, 1819–1914." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 36, no. 1 (2005): 46.

<sup>19</sup> 新加坡宗乡会馆史略 *Xinjiapo Zong Xiang Hui Guan Shi Lue* = *History of Clan Associations in Singapore*.

Singapore, Singapore: 新加坡宗乡会馆联合总会, 2005.

<sup>20</sup> Tay, Secretary General of Eng Yong Tong Tay Si Association; See, Chairman of Nanyang See’s Clan Association. Interview by Clara Khoo. 26 Mar 2022.

花县会馆's main role was to help new immigrants from the 花都 district of Guangzhou city to settle down and find jobs. Likewise, Mr. Chu, Chairman of 清远会馆 shared that the *huiguan* would receive word via telegram of various immigrants arriving at Clifford Pier and their role was to provide them with lodging while they sourced for employment.<sup>21</sup>

However, after several subsequent generations, the sense of belonging and attachment to China gradually eroded. This period coincided with political developments in China when the Communist Party became the sole ruling party in 1949. For the overseas Chinese, the period between the 1950's and 1960's was known as a 'dark period' associated with the raging anti-Communist Cold War as linkages with China were frowned upon by the Straits Settlements Government, which was the colonial government of the day.<sup>22</sup> Following the establishment of the Chinese Communist Party in China, the Government responded by imposing restrictions on travel to China and tightened Chinese migration to Singapore.<sup>23</sup>

The two decades leading up to Singapore's independence were also shaped by numerous other geopolitical developments that had a wide-ranging impact on the Chinese community in Singapore. The Malayan Emergency (1948-1960), the ongoing larger context of the Cold War (1949-1989) and Operation Coldstore (1963) led to a drastic clampdown on ~~decline of~~ left-wing influence in Singapore politics. 清远会馆's chairman, Mr. Chu recounted that clan bosses who were suspected of being communists were "scooped up under Section 55 of the Sedition Act".<sup>24</sup>

The 1960's and 1970's also saw the setting up of various grassroots organisations under the People's Association (PA). The PA was established on 1 July 1960 to foster racial harmony and social cohesion which form the basis for nation building.<sup>25</sup> Its grassroots activities were carried

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<sup>21</sup> Chu, Chairman of 清远会馆. Interview by Clara Khoo. 19 Feb 2022.

<sup>22</sup> Zheng, Chairman of 花县会馆. Interview by Clara Khoo. 28 Feb 2022.

<sup>23</sup> Lim, How Seng. "Social Structure and Bang Interactions." In *A general history of the Chinese in Singapore*, 2019, p. 131.

<sup>24</sup> Chu, Chairman of 清远会馆. Interview by Clara Khoo. 19 Feb 2022. The Sedition Act was introduced by the British in part to curb local opposition to British colonial rule and criminalises conduct with seditious tendencies.

<sup>25</sup> "Our History." People's Association. Accessed March 19, 2022. <https://www.pa.gov.sg/about-us/our-history>.

out in community spaces such as the CCs, which were originally built by the colonial government in the 1950s as recreational spaces. Thereafter, Residents' Committees (RCs) and Neighborhood Committees (NCs) were set up in 1965 and 1978 respectively to improve communication between the people and the government as well as to promote a community spirit.<sup>26</sup> The CCs, RCs and NCs were political tools to deny space to the Leftists and to blur the existing divisions that existed in Singapore society then, where different ethnic communities were living in their own enclaves. Finally, as the PAP gradually took charge of even the welfare needs of the population, the *huiguan* ceased to function as the center of the Chinese community in Singapore.

While it was the *huiguan* who had earlier founded the Chinese medium schools and provided financial support in the form of bursaries and scholarships for children of members, the diminished role of the Chinese medium schools in the 1970's further reduced the influence of the *huiguan*. After 1979, all schools were converted into "national schools" and English became the main medium of instruction.<sup>27</sup> The Ministry of Education also laid out certain regulations on classroom sizes and amenities that disadvantaged the smaller privately-run *huiguan* schools.<sup>28</sup> Many smaller Hokkien vernacular schools around Telok Ayer were unable to hire English-speaking teachers and had to close down.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the introduction of the Speak Mandarin Campaign (SMC) in 1979 caused a decline in the use of dialects and further diminished the relevance of the vernacular schools under various *huiguan*. The effect of the SMC "led to the sacrifice of the various Chinese dialects considered as 'precious assets' by the early immigrant Chinese".<sup>30</sup>

Even in spatial terms, the *huiguan* were also subjected to government policies such as the Land Acquisition Act that threatened their existence. Passed in 1966, the Act provided for "the acquisition of land for public and certain other specified purposes" and fairly limited quantum of

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<sup>26</sup> *25 years with the people 1960–1985: People's Association 25th anniversary publication*. (1985). Singapore: The Association, p. 8.

<sup>27</sup> Pang, Cheng Lian. "Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations: Revitalising Clan Associations." In *50 Years of the Chinese Community in Singapore*, 2016, p. 30.

<sup>28</sup> Gan, Josephine. Secretary General of the Hokkien *huiguan*. Interview by Clara Khoo. 21 Mar 2022.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Ng, Patrick Chin Leong. *A study of attitudes of dialect speakers towards the speak Mandarin campaign in Singapore*. Springer Singapore, 2017.

compensation would be offered on account of the acquisition.<sup>31</sup> One example was the Kwong Wai Shiu Peck San Theng 广惠肇碧山亭. It was founded in 1870 to cater to the Cantonese and Hakkas immigrants from three prefectures in Guangzhou, Huizhou and Zhaoqing. Currently, both the 花县会馆 and 清远会馆 are part of the 16 clans that manage this federation. 广惠肇碧山亭 also had one of the largest burial grounds in Singapore, covering 324 acres of land but after a hundred years, the cemetery was officially acquired by the state in 1979 to develop new towns in Toa Payoh and Bishan, in exchange for \$4.9 million.<sup>32</sup> It was only after several rounds of negotiations did the state grant 广惠肇 a 3-hectare land with a 99-year lease to preserve its ancestral temple and construct a new columbarium. This in effect demonstrates how the *huiguan* and its burial grounds could not escape from the government's demolish-and-rebuild redevelopment plans in a land-scarce Singapore.

By the 1990s, the *huiguan* faced an existential crisis brought on by the above confluence of factors and increasingly became dormant corridors. While the older generation of immigrants regarded their ethnic identity as “grounded in the historicity of China” and still see China as their homeland, this sense is not shared by many younger Chinese Singaporeans, regardless of whether they are Chinese or English educated.<sup>33</sup> From my interviews, most of the *huiguan* also shared that the twin problems they faced in the new millennium was related to membership (especially at the leadership level) and finance, especially for the smaller associations.<sup>34</sup> Influenced by the Western ideologies of individualism, the younger generation tend to be more self-centered and are more interested in what the *huiguan* can do for them as opposed to the community-centric spirit of philanthropy and communal self-help of the older generation.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> “LAND ACQUISITION ACT 1966.” Singapore Statutes Online. Accessed March 19, 2022.

<https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/LAA1966>.

<sup>32</sup> 碧山亭. Accessed March 19, 2022. <http://kwspst.weebly.com/>.

<sup>33</sup> Tong, Chee Kiong. *Identity and ethnic relations in Southeast Asia: Racializing Chineseness*. Springer Science & Business Media, 2010, p. 66.

<sup>34</sup> Tay, Secretary General of Eng Yong Tong Tay Si Association; See, Chairman of Nanyang See's Clan Association. Interview by Clara Khoo. 26 Mar 2022.

<sup>35</sup> Tay, Secretary General of Eng Yong Tong Tay Si Association. Interview by Clara Khoo. 26 Mar 2022.

Wee Cho Yaw, then Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the United Overseas Bank and a respected community leader, bluntly but accurately summarised the state of Chinese clan associations in Singapore - he warned, “unless clan associations found new roles in the new era... they faced oblivion”.<sup>36</sup>

## 5. Keeping the Corridor Open - Reinvention as a Survivalist Strategy

In a bid to help the *huiguan* stay relevant, a central body was set up in 1985 to facilitate collaboration among the associations - this was the Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations (SFCCA). The SFCCA’s focus “wasn’t about merging weaker clans with stronger ones... [but] to get the bigger associations [to] help the smaller ones to revitalise themselves”.<sup>37</sup> The growing influx of Western culture and ideas led the *huiguan* to see their mission as being a bulwark of Asian values during this period. It is noteworthy that the SFCCA was directly promoted by the government and played the role of integrating traditional Chinese associations in contemporary times. Today, the SFCCA’s mission continues to be “to lead the clan associations, and to promote and reinforce Chinese culture and values”.<sup>38</sup> SFCCA’s activities such as the annual River Hongbao and Spring Reception during the Lunar New Year and Mid-Autumn Festival celebrations are responses to address the state’s concern over the loss of Chinese values.

Interestingly, another reinvention strategy that the SFCCA adopted is via its support for the state’s multicultural and multiracial policies to ensure a harmonious Singapore within the larger rubric of nation-building. For instance, the SFCCA today organizes programmes in line with key commemorative events such as a “Building a Cohesive Society” webinar co-organised by SFCCA and the Racial Harmony Resource Centre in 2021 and the annual National Day Sing-Along.<sup>39</sup> Mr. Thomas Chua, former NMP and the fourth president of the SFCCA, was quoted saying that the *huiguan* in Singapore must “exert a positive influence, unite the different ethnic groups, build up

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<sup>36</sup> Pang, Cheng Lian. "Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations: Revitalising Clan Associations." In *50 Years of the Chinese Community in Singapore*, 2016, p. 32.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 33.

<sup>38</sup> “About SFCCA.” Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations. Accessed March 19, 2022. <https://sfcca.sg/en/sfcca/>

<sup>39</sup> “SFCCA Events.” Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations. Accessed March 19, 2022. <https://sfcca.sg/en/category/sfcca-event/>.

social cohesion as well as promote positive exchange and interaction amongst citizens”.<sup>40</sup> As such, besides being a bastion of Chinese culture and heritage, promoting activities that strengthen Singapore’s multicultural identity is one strategy that the SFCCA has adopted to ensure the ongoing relevance of *huiguan* in Singapore society today.

The focus and priorities of the *huiguan* had to evolve and adapt to the changing socio-economic and political environment. The linkages back to China are no longer only emotional but have evolved to reflect the pragmatic interests of its members, namely, having economic and business links back to China. According to 花县会馆’s chairman, tapping on the association’s close ties with the 花县 liaison office in China and *huiguan* in the other countries was a way to stay relevant and attract younger members seeking to venture into China and deepen their business ties there.<sup>41</sup> Nonetheless, these transnational connections and exchanges contribute to an enrichment of Chinese culture as well as the formation of a larger imagined community, beyond the borders of a nation-state.

Another noteworthy survival strategy in the 21st century was the integration of new Chinese immigrants (*xin yimin*) and this idea of helping them settle down is poetically connected back to the historical role of *huiguan* in providing help to the Chinese immigrants. The arrival of the *xin yimin* coincided with the Singapore’s foreign policy of increasing and deepening relations with China after Deng Xiaoping’s economic reforms. A significant portion of the new permanent residents in Singapore are those from mainland China and this presents a potentially tricky solution for the *huiguan*. This can be a double-edged sword when the *xin yimin* do not assimilate well. To tackle this, the SFCCA started a quarterly publication in 2012, titled “Oneness” (*Hua Hui*) that was targeted at the *xin yimin* to facilitate their integration into the local Chinese community and

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<sup>40</sup> Ong, Justin. “Chinese Clan Associations Must Resist Foreign Influence, Says New Federation President.” The Straits Times, October 16, 2021. <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/community/chinese-clan-associations-must-resist-foreign-influence-new-federation-president>.

<sup>41</sup> Secretary General Remarks by Zheng, De Yuan. 新加坡花县会馆96周年纪念特刊 (1919-2015).

promote a multicultural lifestyle (Fig 2 below).<sup>42</sup> Regardless, these *xin yimin* sometimes formed their own new migrant associations instead of joining the existing ones.



Fig. 2

These new migrant associations do not have much in common with the older associations and cannot reasonably mitigate the challenges faced by the latter. The transnational links established by the new associations are more national in focus as opposed to hometown or locality specific. For instance, the Hua Yuan Association was founded in 2001 by mainland-born Chinese professionals and has members who come from almost every province in China. Others, such as the Kowloon Club, which was established in 1990, sought to give a “helping hand” to the new immigrants from Hong Kong about residential affairs, job hunting and their children’s education.<sup>43</sup> The new migrants also tend to be more connected through their business and alumni associations as opposed to a particular locality since they lived, studied, and worked in different cities in China.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, the older *huiguan* and these new associations serve very different clienteles and have differing agendas that may not always overlap. If anything, the overlap is mostly seen in the cultural sphere when there are joint events or celebrations between the two types of

<sup>42</sup> “Promoting Singapore's Multicultural Society in Chinese.” Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre, Accessed March 19, 2022. <https://singaporeccc.org.sg/events/oneness-magazine/>.

<sup>43</sup> Lau, Edward. New Page 1. Accessed March 26, 2022. <http://www.kowloonclub.org.sg/old/kcabout.htm>.

<sup>44</sup> Gan, Josephine. Secretary General of the Hokkien *huiguan*. Interview by Clara Khoo. 21 Mar 2022.

associations. For the *huiguan*, assimilating the *xin yimin* remains an elusive solution to the current twin problems of declining membership and finances.

## **Conclusion**

By the second half of the 20th century, the *raison d'être* for the *huiguan* no longer remains as being the receiving end of a migrant corridor to offer help and assistance to immigrants arriving from China. A good number of associations also faced extinction because of the state's nation-building policies. These successful nation-building policies and language policies led to the subsequent generations of Singaporean Chinese having little to no knowledge of their cultural connection with China.

The challenging period after the Chinese Civil War ended by the 1980s when both the government and *huiguan* had a convergence in interests. This period saw the government encouraging all ethnic groups to retain their own language, culture, and traditional customs against the backdrop of globalisation. The associations quickly recognized that working with the government and assuming the function of being a bastion of Chinese traditional culture and values was necessary. As time goes on, one can only speculate as to what other forms of compromise might be necessary to act as a doorstep to keep the corridors between China and Singapore open.

(4760 words – inclusive of footnotes/bibliography)

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