

*Singapore Federation of  
Chinese Clan Associations  
Apex of Singapore Chinese Community\**

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**Abstract**

The Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations (SFCCA) was formally inaugurated on 27 January 1986. The formation of the SFCCA is undoubtedly a major event in the history of the Chinese in Singapore. The Federation's main objective is clear: to concentrate manpower as well as material and financial resources into launching large-scale activities that are difficult for the individual clan association to handle.

Since its establishment, the SFCCA has been responsible for the mission of leading the Chinese community, its cultural activities, and the Chinese tradition. It organises or sponsors educational, cultural, and social activities to raise public awareness of the Chinese language, culture, and tradition. The SFCCA has since come to represent the apex of the Chinese clan associations in Singapore .

\* Translated by John Kua S.H.

The history of the Chinese clan associations in Singapore is in fact a microcosm of the development of the Chinese community for the past hundred years.<sup>1</sup> Conceptually, the clan associations are divided into two categories, namely, kinship clan associations; and locality clan associations. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the clan associations have played an important role in the history of the Chinese in Singapore.

27 January 1986 is memorable as the date in which the Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations (SFCCA) was formally established.<sup>2</sup>

The Federation was born out of a specific historical moment. Since Singapore's independence in 1965, most of the core functions of the clan associations had been superseded by the government's welfare and educational services. Hence, the Chinese clan associations had virtually completed its mission, and most of the association became less active. However, after the establishment of the SFCCA, many clan associations began to revive various activities.

It has been over 30 years since the SFCCA's inception. To an individual, 30 years is a milestone, an important turning point in life. Similarly, after 30 years, the clan association has also reached a crossroad. To move forward, it has to keep pace with the times and make itself relevant.

## The Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations

The organisation of the SFCCA is a product of its era. Its establishment and development are inseparable from the history of Chinese immigration. Early Chinese immigrants were mostly destitute and hailed from the coastal provinces of China, such as Fujian, Guangdong and Hainan Island. Apart from a negligible number of businessmen, most of them were labourers, skilled workers (such as carpenters) or "down and out" literati (who later became letter writers, clerical staff and private school teachers), and they formed the middle and lower social strata of Chinese society in Singapore in those years. They came to Singapore, a thriving business hub in the Malay Archipelago, and they struggled to live hand to mouth in this remote place, alone and without relatives.

Once in the foreign land, it was imperative for them to be acquainted with their fellow countrymen for mutual help and social security purposes. It was in this historical context that the clan associations were born and they played an active role in this regard. The close cooperation and care of fellow countrymen was an essential condition for survival in the foreign land. The inscription on the stele on the reconstruction of the Ying Fo Fui Kun in

<sup>1</sup> 〈新加坡华人会馆沿革史序〉, 林孝胜、林源福、柯木林编, 《新加坡华人会馆沿革史》(新加坡: 国家档案馆, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> According to the Registry of Societies, the registration date for the SFCCA is 12 December 1985. On 27 January 1986, the inauguration ceremony was held at the Shangri-La Hotel. That evening, more than 1,000 representatives from 127 clan associations participated. The then Second Deputy Prime Minister Ong Teng Cheong was Guest of Honour. See 柯木林主编, 《总会三年》(新加坡: 新加坡宗乡会馆联合总会, 1989), 页113.

1844, “when traveling abroad, mutual assistance comes first, and in far distant lands, providing abode is paramount”,<sup>3</sup> gives the best portrayal of the situation in those years.

In time, the role played by the clan association became more complex. It became the contact centre and unifying organisation for all local immigrants.

Under colonial rule, the well-being of the Chinese community was not actively addressed by the authorities and so it was left to the Chinese community to take care of their own interests. In the beginning, the association simply provided employment and accommodation for new immigrant clansmen, such as caring for the sick and the poor. Its duties later developed to include the organising of wedding and funeral rites, resolving disputes, maintaining law and order, running hospitals and schools, public welfare and charity, etc.<sup>4</sup>

However, the development of the Chinese clan association was not smooth sailing. As early as 1890, the British colonial government promulgated the “Dangerous Societies Ordinance” to control their activities. Many associations were concerned about the threat of being closed down.

Fifty-two years later, during the Japanese Occupation from 1942 to 1945,<sup>5</sup> clan associations were in a state of virtual hibernation for three years and 8 months. From 1959 to 1970s, clan associations began to decline. Newly-established clan associations were extremely rare and insignificant (Table 1).

In particular, at the beginning of the founding of the Republic of Singapore, the organisation of the clan association was considered then as “a violation of national policy”. All this had restrained the pace of advancement of the clan association until the 1980s.

**Table 1: Numbers and Percentage Distribution of Chinese Locality/Dialect, Clan/Surname Associations By Period of Establishment/ Registration (1819–c1973).**

Period of Establishment/ Registration	Type of Association					
	Locality /Dialect		Clan/Surname		Total Figure	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
1819-1890	18	13.5	14	7.0	32	9.6
1891-1941	64	48.1	60	30.0	124	37.2
1945-1959	45	33.8	93	46.5	138	41.4
1960-1973	6	4.5	33	16.5	39	11.7
Total	133	100.0	200	100.0	333	100.0

Source: Modified from Cheng Lim Keak, *Social Change and the Chinese in Singapore* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1985), p.39.

<sup>3</sup> 〈重建应和馆碑〉(1844), 陈育崧、陈荊和编著,《新加坡华文碑铭集录》(香港: 中文大学出版部出版社, 1972), 页171.

<sup>4</sup> 柯木林主编,《新加坡华人通史》(新加坡: 新加坡宗乡会馆联合总会, 2015), 页75–127.

<sup>5</sup> The Japanese Occupation in Singapore started from 15 February 1942 to 12 September 1945. See 柯木林, 〈关于新加坡日治时期的断限〉, *Lianhe Zaobao*, 7 March 2012.

On 2 December 1984, **nine clan associations** in Singapore, to wit, the Singapore Hokkien Huay Kuan, Teochew Poit Ip Huay Kuan, Singapore Kwang Tung Association, Singapore Foochow Association, Nanyang Khek Community Guild, Singapore Kiung Chow Hwee Kuan (now the Singapore Hainan Hwee Kuan), Sam Kiang Huay Kwan, Singapore Chin Kang Huay Kuan, and the Singapore Hui Ann Association jointly organised the Forum on the “Role of Chinese Clan Associations in the New Era” to break the hiatus of the associations over the years.<sup>6</sup>

The Forum was held at the Teochew Poit Ip Huay Kuan, where 665 delegates from 185 associations participated and was inaugurated by then Minister-without-portfolio, Ong Teng Cheong (1936–2002). The Forum affirmed the social functions of the clan associations and discussed how the clan associations can play a more active role in the new era, with the result of 10 recommendations being put forward.

These historic 10 recommendations are as follows:<sup>7</sup>

1. It is necessary for the clan associations to keep up with the new social environments, revise the constitutions of association, allow members of different origins and clans to participate in the activities;
2. initiate self-renewal, arrange successors in a planned and structured system, and allow for able and dedicated youth to enter leadership;
3. organise new activities in accordance to the interests and needs of young people so as to attract them to join;
4. Strive to actively participate in social welfare works;
5. Play an active role in preserving and promoting the traditions and culture of the Chinese, and to promote the Chinese language and Chinese literature;
6. Strengthen ties with community organisations and actively participate in community activities;
7. Strengthen ties and cooperation internally and jointly-organise large-scale activities in accordance with national interests and the objectives of the clan associations, such as academic seminars, sports, entertainment and performances;
8. Call on the government for concession rent or preferential treatment for clan associations in their purchase of properties;
9. Call on the government to classify the Bukit Pasoh area as a clan associations zone, and work with the Singapore Tourist Promotion Board to develop this area as one of the oriental cultural centres ;
10. To establish the proposed Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations so as to coordinate future development and cooperation among the various associations and at the same time to facilitate implementation of the above proposals.

<sup>6</sup> See “Chinese groups urged to form national unit”, *The Straits Times*, 3 December 1984.

<sup>7</sup> See 《总会三年》，op. cit., 页 109.

Following the Forum, seven of the clan associations, the Singapore Hokkien Huay Kuan, the Teochew Poit Ip Huay Kuan, Singapore Kwangtung Hui Kuan, the Nanyang Khek Community Guild, Singapore Kiung Chow Hwee Kuan (now the Singapore Hainan Hwee Kuan), the Sam Kiang Huay Kwan, and Singapore Foochow Association went ahead to form the proposed SFCCA.

On 12 December 1985, the registration of SFCCA was granted by the Registry of Societies. One month later, on 27 January 1986, the SFCCA was formally inaugurated. Hitherto, the SFCCA represents the supreme organisation in the Singapore Chinese community. **The objectives for which the SFCCA is formed are:**<sup>8</sup>

- (1) to lead the Chinese clan associations in Singapore
- (2) to promote and reinforce understanding and appreciation of Chinese language, culture and values
- (3) to establish an integrated network of Chinese clan associations in Singapore
- (4) to advance and improve social harmony and national cohesion among the members of all races resident in Singapore
- (5) to do all such other things as are incidental or conducive to the above objectives

The above objectives are seen as a lifesaving strategy to face off the declining fate of the clan associations. For better coordinating and reorganising, the SFCCA changed from addressing the simple interests of the clan to the welfare of all Chinese people (see point 5 above). It has emerged and adopted a posture that transcended issues of geography, blood, clan and ethnicity. At the same time, being the apex of the Chinese clan associations in Singapore, the SFCCA has also become a stronghold and light that defends, preserves and promotes traditional Chinese culture (see points 2 and 3 above). To salvage the consciousness of the Chinese and preserve the heritage of Chinese culture, the establishment of the SFCCA has demonstrated new opportunities for the survival of the various clan associations.

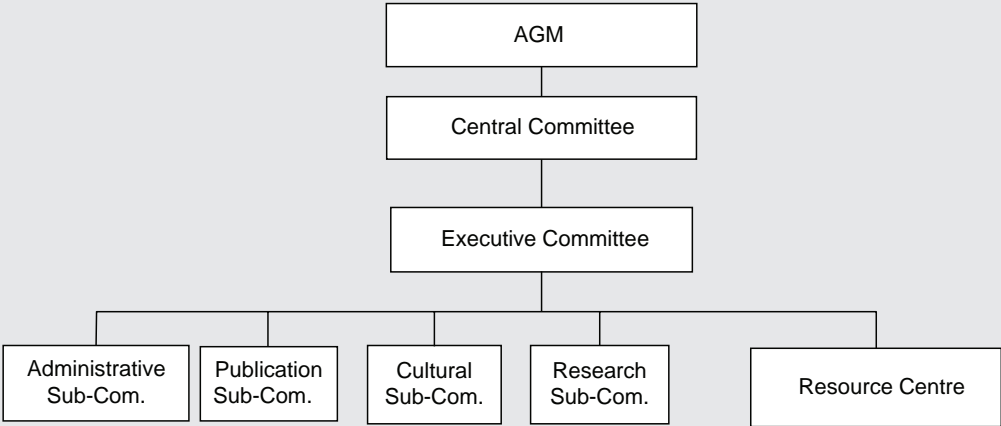
The establishment of the SFCCA is undoubtedly a major event in the history of the Chinese in Singapore. Its task is very clear: concentrating manpower, logistical and financial resources to craft out an overall plan for launching a number of large-scale activities that are difficult for the individual clan association to handle.

In order to implement the programmes of the SFCCA, the Central Committee oversees the operation of the five Executive Committees, i.e. the Administrative Sub-committee, the Publication Sub-committee, the Cultural Sub-committee, the Research Sub-committee, and the Resource Centre (Figure 1),<sup>9</sup> which are responsible for implementing the decisions of the Central Committee and putting them into practice. Over the past 30 years, the SFCCA has achieved remarkable results in building a unique Singapore Chinese culture through many organised and coordinated activities.

<sup>8</sup> Clause 4 (Objects) of the SFCCA Constitution.

<sup>9</sup> The five Executive Committees were subsequently changed to six Committees, namely: Membership Affairs Committee, Social Affairs Committee, Cultural Committee, Research Committee, Youth Committee and Property Committee.

Figure 1: Organisation Structure of the SFCCA (1986)



Source: 柯木林主编,《总会三年》(新加坡:新加坡宗乡会馆联合总会,1989),页110.

Historical Heritage

The Chinese clan associations in Singapore have a long tradition of establishing a federation or general association. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many big clan associations (either kinship or locality) formed their respective general association, such as the Singapore Lee Clan General Association (1907), the Singapore Nanyang Jiang Xia TJian (1924), Chang Chow General Association (1929), Teochew Poit Ip Huay Kuan (1929), Nanyang Khek Community Guild (1929), and Kwangtung Hui Kuan (1937) and so on.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, the organisation of a Federation (general association) is not a new concept. Of course, in the past, these general clan associations were confined only to their fellow kinship or locality groups. It was not until the establishment of the SFCCA that the kinship and geopolitical or locality clan organisations came together as a unified entity. This is indeed an epoch-making pioneering work. However, some have doubted that the purpose of the establishment of the SFCCA is to “merge” the other small clan associations. This is a big misunderstanding.<sup>11</sup>

As mentioned above, in the beginning, the SFCCA management was mainly divided into two tiers. The first tier was the Central Committee, which was led by the seven founding members of SFCCA; and the second tier was the Executive Committee (Figure 1). The Executive Committee was responsible for submitting proposals to the Central Committee. This arrangement seemed to have inherited from Tan Kah Kee’s restructured Singapore Hokkien Huay Kuan (SHHK).

<sup>10</sup> 柯木林,〈华人会馆的现代化问题〉,柯木林著,《石叻史记》(新加坡:青年书局出版,2007),页255.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

In March 1929, Tan Kah Kee, a Chinese immigrant, became the chairman of the SHHK and began to revamp the SHHK's organisation structure. After the reorganisation, the leadership of SHHK consisted of two committees: an executive of five members, and a supervisory committee, also of five members, with five departments General Affairs (eight members), Education (seven members), Economics (five members), Construction (five members), and Welfare (five members).<sup>12</sup> The leadership of the SFCCA, established in 1986, seems to have the shadow of the then reorganised SHHK.

The Hokkien *bang* (dialect group) has been the strongest and most powerful in Singapore's Chinese community, and thus their leaders traditionally have become de facto Chinese community leaders.<sup>13</sup> In fact, the Hokkien *bang* has always taken a leadership role during the defining moments in the history of the Chinese in Singapore. For instance, Tan Kah Kee in the Chinese national salvation movement in the 1930s and Tan Lark Sye in spearheading the founding of the first ever Chinese-language Nanyang University in the 1950s.

This tradition continues till today and has remained unchanged for the past 100 years. Wee Cho Yaw, the first chairman of the SFCCA, was also the chairman of the SHHK. His successor Chua Thian Poh took over his duties as president of the SFCCA and chairmanship of the SHHK.<sup>14</sup> In this case, the successful completion of the leadership transition is a tradition inherited from the older generations. The organisation of the SFCCA has its historical heritage.

## Keeping Up with the Times

In October 2010, Wee Cho Yaw, who had served 25 years, handed smoothly over the chairmanship to the new president, Chua Thian Poh.<sup>15</sup> Since becoming president, Chua has become a dominant figure of the Chinese community.

Chua had a suite of management ideas for the operation of the SFCCA. In his opinion, every council member should be devoted to serve SFCCA for 5–10 years; the council member of the SFCCA must not just “wear a title”, but must set key performance indicators (KPIs), just like commercial enterprises and companies.

“In the fierce competition of today, everything that does not advance falls backwards, and the same can be said of the SFCCA. Although it is said that leadership roles in the SFCCA a voluntary duty, the council members must continue to push themselves and prepare for self-renewal.” In a nutshell, “organisations should keep pace with the times and seek breakthroughs.” Therefore, the SFCCA must first have a good management mechanism,

<sup>12</sup> C.F. Yong, *Tan Kah-Kee : The Making of an Overseas Chinese Legend*, Revised Edition (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co., Pte. Ltd, 2013), p.139.

<sup>13</sup> 《新加坡华人通史》, op. cit., 页80.

<sup>14</sup> “When you’ve made it, you have to give back to society”, *The Straits Times*, 7 August 2010.

<sup>15</sup> After taking over the leadership of SFCCA, Chua Thian Poh was re-designated to the President of the SFCCA.





*The SFCCA's Management Retreat at Malacca (12 to 13 January 2013) to chart the strategies and workplans for 2014 and thereafter.*

especially an efficient secretariat, and secondly, it must be able to inject new blood into the organisation so that functions of the SFCCA can move forward.<sup>16</sup>

Prompted by this idea, the SFCCA carried out many innovative initiatives to keep abreast with the times. These are:

**Table 2: SFCCA's Activities (from October 2010 onwards)**

Date	Activity/Project	Description
2011	Established "SFCCA Scholarship"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To nurture bilingual and bicultural talents</li><li>• To sponsor up to 5 students each year to top universities in China to pursue undergraduate studies (33 students have since been sponsored and 17 of them have graduated)</li></ul>
	Renovation of SFCCA building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Renovated office, meeting rooms, building exterior, open space of original building interior, enclosed patio, and designed a History Gallery</li></ul>
2011/2012	Revision of Constitution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Formed a "Constitution Committee" in April 2011 to look into the Revision. By September 2011, the AGM agreed to the Revision. The Revision of Constitution was approved by the Registry of Societies in January 2012</li><li>• Council members increased from 15 to 31</li><li>• Council members' term of office extended from the existing 2 years to 3 years</li><li>• Allowed to accept associate members</li></ul>
June 2011	Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong consented to be a patron of SFCCA	The first patron in 25 years since its establishment

<sup>16</sup> 《早报星期天》, 1 August 2010.



Date	Activity/Project	Description
Sep 2011	Officially launched the "UniSIM-SFCCA Sponsorship (now known as SUSS-SFCCA Sponsorship)"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aimed at encouraging lifelong learning and nurturing more bilingual and bicultural talents. Allows the realisation of dreams of SFCCA members who wish to pursue a bachelor's degree</li> <li>Provides 5 sponsorships each year to SFCCA members and clan staff to apply</li> </ul>
	Established "Clan of the Year Award"	Encourages SFCCA members to initiate more meaningful activities to promote Chinese culture as well as social and national harmony
Feb 2012	Mooted the idea of setting up "Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre"	Completed in end 2016
June 2012	Created SFCCA web platform	
Sep 2012	<i>Yuan</i> Magazine	Changed from quarterly to bi-monthly
	<i>Oneness</i> Magazine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has the aim of integrating new citizens</li> <li>First issue was published on 8 September 2012 (quarterly)</li> </ul>
Oct 2013	Expanded Working Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To more fully promote the works of the SFCCA, the Executive Committee has increased from the original 5 committees to 6</li> <li>The newly-installed Property Committee is especially responsible for the maintenance of the SFCCA building, and provided advice on construction of the "Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre"</li> </ul>
Sep 2014	宗乡汇典, ("Publication Directory of the Clan Associations in Singapore") a comprehensive digital mobile app as part of the SFCCA- Integrated Media Mobile Portal (IMMP)	For the preservation of Cultural Assets of Clan Associations with Technology
Nov 2015	Published <i>A General History of the Chinese in Singapore</i>	This is the first comprehensive book about the history of the Chinese in Singapore, written in Chinese
Feb 2016	Initiated the "SFCCA Outstanding Youth Award"	Awarded to young people in clan associations who have contributed to Singapore's cultural ecology
Others	Number of Activities	From 10 activities per year increased to today's annual 30 to 50 activities
	Office Administration	Staff strength increased from 10 to 17
	Number of association members	From nearly 200 members in 2010, the number of members has increased to 235 as of 8 August 2018, i.e., 226 Chinese Clan Associations and 9 associate members.

Source: SFCCA's Secretariat Office (8 August 2018).

Table 2 shows that on the solid foundation laid by former Chairman Wee Cho Yaw, the SFCCA embarked on a new journey. The SFCCA building was renovated and expanded, the quality of staff improved, and the office operations was made more professional by instituting a professional management system and reorganising the internal administration. In 2013, it proposed the establishment of the “Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre” (SCCC), a new milestone. After the completion of the SCCC by end of 2016, the SFCCA moved on to yet another higher launch point.

Currently, there are six executive committees in the SFCCA: the Membership Affairs Committee, Social Affairs Committee, Cultural Committee, Research Committee, Youth Committee, and the Property Committee (Figure 2)<sup>17</sup>. Each committee has between 10 and 13 members. In the Research Committee, there are 12 members, including new immigrants. This is in line with the government’s integration policy. A fast-track way for new immigrants to be integrated into the local mainstream society is for them to participate in the activities of the SFCCA.



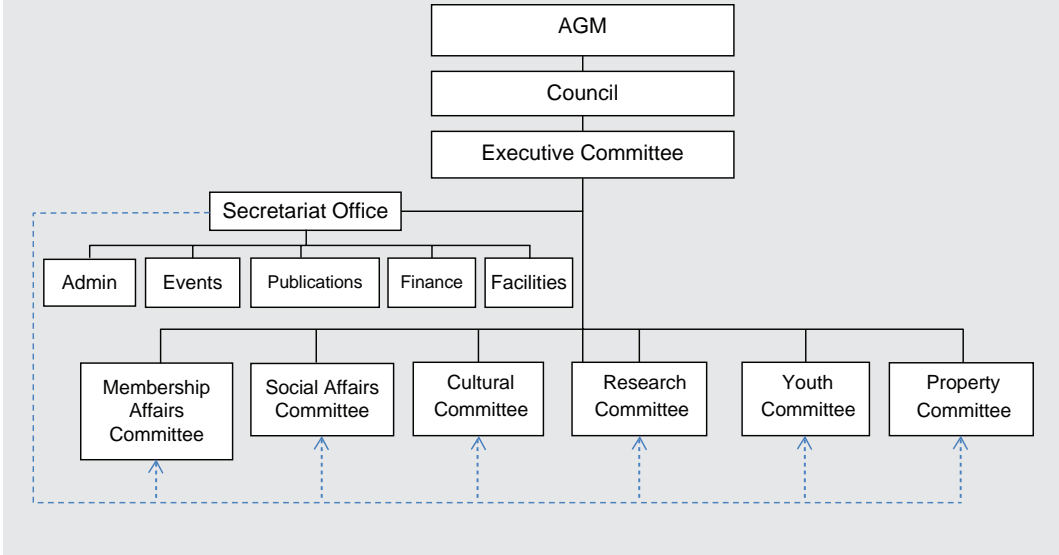
Yuan 《源》 magazine’s 100<sup>th</sup> issue (2012).

Over the past few years, the SFCCA has been very concerned about the integration of new immigrants into the mainstream Chinese community and Singapore’s multi-racial society and has launched many important projects in which new immigrant organisations are invited to participate, such as the “Clan Association Heritage Visits”, “Integration of New Immigrants”, a series of talks on “New Immigrants and the Singapore Society”, the “Get to Know Singapore” Contest and so on, which are aimed at giving new immigrants a better understanding of Singapore. In addition to the regular mouthpiece publication, *Yuan* (bi-monthly), the SFCCA has also published another magazine specifically for new immigrants, *Oneness* (quarterly).<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See footnote 9.

<sup>18</sup> The first issue of the SFCCA’s *Yuan* magazine was published at the inauguration ceremony of the SFCCA on 27 January 1986. The magazine was originally a quarterly and was subsequently changed to a bi-monthly publication from September 2012. As of August 2018, it has published 134 issues. The content mainly reports on the news and activities of the Chinese community and clan associations; *Oneness* was first published in September 2012. This is a magazine specifically targeting new immigrants. This quarterly magazine has so far published 24 issues.

Figure 2: Organisation Structure of the SFCCA (2016)



Source: Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations website, (<http://www.sfcca.sg/aboutus/structure>), February 2016.

## Research Committee

The main task of the Research Committee has been to popularise, promote and improve historical research of the Chinese in Singapore.

**Kua Bak Lim**<sup>19</sup> has led the Research Committee for almost 20 years. Kua joined the SFCCA in September 1985 when it was still in the Protem Committee stage and served for 10 years as the first Chairman of its Research Sub-Committee from 1986 to 1995. After 1995, due to overseas work commitments, Kua left the SFCCA. Fifteen years later in 2010, he was reappointed as the Chairman of the Research Committee again. In January 2011, when the SFCCA commemorated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding, — Kua contributed an article entitled “My Return to the SFCCA”, which was published in the 25<sup>th</sup> *Anniversary of SFCCA* magazine, a special publication to commemorate the event. Kua has thus witnessed the evolution of the SFCCA from its birth till the present day and this article describes his personal perception on SFCCA.<sup>20</sup>

The major tasks of the Research Committee can be divided into two phases: For the first 15 years, the work was mainly on popularising and preserving the heritage and culture of

<sup>19</sup> Special thanks must be given to Alan Chua for introducing Kua Bak Lim to the SFCCA. Alan Chua was the first Secretary-General of the SFCCA, and also Kua's senior in high school. Since Alan knew Kua personally on his scholarly interest in the history of the Chinese in Singapore, Alan invited Kua to take charge of the Research Sub-Committee (now the Research Committee).

<sup>20</sup> 柯木林, 〈“一万年来谁著史”: 重返宗乡总会绪言〉, 《总会二十五年》(新加坡: 新加坡宗乡会馆联合总会, 2011), 页53–56.



*Kua Bak Lim (third from left) and his first Research Sub-Committee (1986).*

the Chinese community. The second phase started in 2010 when Kua Bak Lim resumed to helm the Research Committee. Based on the past 15 years' experience, the focus has been to disseminate and promote research into the history and culture of the Singapore Chinese. Since April 2011, a series of international conferences and lectures have been organised, such as the International Conference on "The Spirit of the Hokkien clan and its Businessmen" (April 2011); an exhibition on "The Qiaopi culture of Singapore" (September 2012); the Straits Settlements Forum, "A Hundred Years Review: The Peranakan and their Culture" (September 2013) and Forum on "The Legend of Guan Gong" (August 2014). In addition, there were also specific lectures such as "Doing Business in China: from the historical and cultural Perspective" (June 2011).

A popular series of lectures on "the Memories of Old Singapore" was also organised, including "Four Historical Buildings of Singapore" (April 2012), "Money by Mail to China" (September 2012), "Mysteries in Singapore History" (May 2013), and "The Four Distinguished Scholars of Early Singapore" (May 2014). This series of lecture was well received and attendances were almost at full capacity. In October 2015, the "Celebrities and Temples" talk was held so as to help the public explore the relations between famous historical figures and old temples in the history of Chinese in Singapore and to appreciate Southeast Asia's temple culture.

It is worth mentioning that Kua Bak Lim has been the initiator at each stage of these academic activities. For example, when the SFCCA was still at the Protem Committee stage, Kua planned and jointly organised a "History in Your Home" with the *Lianhe Wanbao* to collect historic pictures of Singapore from September 1985 to March 1986. After the official



formation of the SFCCA, these collected old photographs were displayed in an exhibition entitled “History of the Chinese Clan Associations in Singapore” (March 1986), together with collections from the National Archives of Singapore and the Singapore Oral History Department. The exhibition was accompanied by a publication with the same title. At the same time, the “Resource Centre” was set up in August 1986; and a radio programme called “Night Chat on Selat”<sup>21</sup> was broadcasted (March 1987).

In June 1987, Kua was responsible for producing a documentary on the social history of the Chinese community in Singapore titled “A Reflection of Our Past”, a documentary that traces the Singapore Chinese’s historical roots. This 23-minute documentary is the first audio-visual record of the blood, sweat and tears of the early immigrants who laid the foundations for Singapore’s growth and development. The film features interesting stories about the quarantine station for immigrants on St. John’s Island, coolie depot, temples, clan associations, schools, public park, hospitals and many other historical relics. In conjunction with the documentary, the SFCCA also produced bookmarks on “Our Pioneers” and “Historical Monuments” (August 1987).

In January 1989, as editor-in-chief of the commemorative magazine *Three Years of the SFCCA (1986–1989)*, Kua Bak Lim initiated the course for “10 Lectures on Chinese Culture” (29 September to 1 December, 1989). A biography of the Chinese pioneers titled “Who’s Who in the Chinese Community of Singapore” was also published in November 1995.<sup>22</sup>

In September 2013, after leaving SFCCA for 15 years due to overseas work commitments, Kua returned to chair the Research Committee. The first task was to set up a History Gallery, “Singapore Chinese: then and now”. Meanwhile, a pictorial publication of the same title was launched in February 2014,<sup>23</sup> and a mobile application titled “Dreams of Selat” allowing viewers to revisit the History Gallery was also made available from November 2015.

The book *A General History of the Chinese in Singapore* originally in Chinese (on which this English volume is based), is a tribute to the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the

<sup>21</sup> Selat is the old name of Singapore.

<sup>22</sup> This book contains 1,176 outstanding historical figures from political, economic, cultural, educational, artistic, religious fields, among others, in Singapore between 1819 and 1990. It is a systematic record of the lifetime achievements of historical figures of the Chinese in Singapore. These figures played different roles under historical conditions of various eras and contributed to the development of the Chinese community in Singapore. They all deserve a place in the history of the Chinese in Singapore. In addition to the main text, the publication has a few appendices: “Glossary of the Historical terminology of the Singapore Chinese”, “Table of Singapore Clan Associations by Year of Establishment”, “Comparison Table for Singapore Street Names in English / Chinese and Common Chinese Names”, “Comparison Table for Important Chinese /English terminology” and more, as supplementary materials for readers’ reference.

<sup>23</sup> The historical photographs provide viewers with a direct connection and emotional attachment to the historical perspectives behind the pictures. They turn an abstract noun of history into a visual object, which helps to popularise historical knowledge. The book, *Singapore Chinese: Then & Now* is a visual history of Singapore. Its content is mainly based on the 302 pictures displayed in the SFCCA’s History Gallery. 171 of these pictures were selected. All pictures are accompanied by simple captions in both Chinese and English. In addition, the annexure provides basic information on the early Chinese clan leaders from different dialects group as well as eight of the most significance traditional Chinese festivals we used to celebrate.

SFCCA and also marked the SG50 anniversary. On 9 November 2015, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong presided over the book launch ceremony.<sup>24</sup>

This historical volume was edited by Kua Bak Lim and covered 700 years' history of the Chinese in Singapore from the 14<sup>th</sup> century till today. This 800,000-word, 826-page historical reference work took more than three years to prepare. It mobilised a total of 37 scholars from Singapore, Malaysia, China, Hong Kong, Australia and Japan.

This was the first comprehensive Chinese-language scholarly work focusing on the Singapore Chinese. This book systematically and comprehensively reviews and traces the history of the Chinese community in Singapore from a multiple perspectives, allowing readers to understand the historical development of the Singapore Chinese community, their achievements and contributions to nation building.<sup>25</sup>

In conjunction with the book launch, the SFCCA conducted a forum on "A General History of the Chinese in Singapore" so as to promote the book more effectively. The forum was held at the National Library on the afternoon of 6 March 2016 (Sunday) to allow the general public to thoroughly understand this historical monograph. At the same time, the SFCCA also organised for the publication of this English edition of the book.<sup>26</sup>

The academic activities by the Research Committee in these years have provided a platform for sharing and exchange between scholars, historians and the general public. Xiamen University in China regards the SFCCA as one of their collaborative partners in academic research.

## Recent Cultural and Educational Events

In 1992, the SFCCA and the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCCI) jointly founded the Chinese Development Assistance Council (CDAC) to cultivate and develop potential in the Chinese community. In 1993, the Chinese Supplementary Readers' Council was established to recommend students to highly-readable Chinese-language books. The Chinese Heritage Centre was established in 1995 as an Overseas Chinese research centre. In 2004, the SFCCA once again cooperated with the SCCCI to establish a "Chinese Language and Culture Fund" to promote and support the local learning of Chinese language and culture.

In 2011, the SFCCA Scholarship was established to cultivate bicultural and bilingual talents. As the apex of the Chinese clan associations, it also set up the "Clan of the Year Award" in 2012 and has received warm responses from many associations.

<sup>24</sup> At the launching ceremony of the book, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong described *A General History of Chinese in Singapore* as a "precious gift for the Chinese community from the SFCCA". See *Lianhe Zaobao*, 10 November 2015.

<sup>25</sup> 莫美颜,〈全方位多视角看新加坡华人史〉,《早报星期天》,20 December 2015; 王如明,谢声远,〈华人通史通狮城 与总舵手柯木林一席谈〉,《怡和世纪》,期28 (新加坡: 怡和轩会刊, 2016), 页77-78.

<sup>26</sup> 〈宗乡总会庆SG50耗时三年多完成《新加坡华人通史》11月面市〉, *Lianhe Zaobao*, 9 July 2015.





*A grand fireworks display at the River Hong Bao festival in 2016.*

The River Hongbao festival is another signature activity of the SFCCA. This must-see large-scale event is held every Lunar New Year. The River Hongbao project resembles a traditional Chinese temple fair to preserve Lunar New Year customs. More than a million visitors attend this event each year. The festival provides a good outing during the Spring Festival for the people of Singapore, and is also a unique place of cultural interest.

Attracting the younger generation to cultural activities is the main challenge for clan associations today, a concern which is shared by the SFCCA. In order to appeal to the young people, the SFCCA holds large-scale television programmes, namely, the “Chinese Language Challenge” (March/June 2008), “Singapore Chinese Language Speech Championship” (July/September 2011), “Clans’ Youth Got Talent Show” (December 2011), and the “Youth Leadership Camp” (May 2012), among others.

In addition, a comprehensive digital mobile application, 宗乡汇典 (“Publication Directory of the Clan Associations in Singapore”), was launched in September 2014. This app for mobile devices allows users to download library publications, browse and register for SFCCA events, receive the latest news and relevant updates. In February 2016, the SFCCA also advocated the “Outstanding Youth Award” to reward young people who have served in the clan associations and made significant contributions.

To further attract young people, in February 2015, the “Project Old Jewels” website, a graduation project by students from Ngee Ann Polytechnic received the support of the SFCCA. This bilingual website, which integrates video, games and other media, introduces the younger generation to traditional techniques such as lantern-making, embroidery, *songkok*

hats and dancing snakes. Mobile game can be downloaded for free. From these games, they can learn about the rich cultural heritage in Singapore. The SFCCA continues to promote and add content to this platform.<sup>27</sup>

2015 was a significant year in which the SFCCA launched a series of activities related to the history and culture of the Chinese, which it continues to contribute to, popularise and promote.

Today, the SFCCA has transformed itself into a stronghold to promote Chinese culture and preserve traditional Chinese customs. It also works on ways on how to help new immigrants integrate into the larger local community and live in harmony with other ethnic groups. This will be the new historical mission of the SFCCA and also for the Chinese clan associations.



*The 15<sup>th</sup> council members of the SFCCA (2015).*

<sup>27</sup> 〈工院生图文视频并用 推广渐失传统技艺〉, *Lianhe Zaobao*, 22 February 2015.