

Royalist leader Kang Yu-wei, at the invitation of Khoo Seok Wan, toured Singapore in 1900 to rally support from the Singapore Chinese. On the other hand, Sun Yat-sen and his followers set up the Singapore Branch of the Tung Meng Hui (Revolutionary Alliance) in 1906 as his revolutionary base in Singapore. In the first decade of the 20th century, these different political forces converged on Singapore to woo the Chinese overseas in Southeast Asia and the Chinese in Singapore and British Malaya, in particular. This intensive series of events surrounding China-oriented politics also helped promote Chinese nationalism among sections of the Chinese population in Singapore. In addition, these events also divided Chinese society along the lines of political ideology rather than along *bang* or dialect lines.

Table 3: Chinese Population of Singapore by Bang, 1901–1931

Year	Hokkien	Cantonese	Teochew	Hainanese	Hakka	Others
1901 (%)	59,117 (35.4%)	30,729 (18.7%)	27,564 (16.8%)	9,451 (6.0%)	8,514 (5.0%)	(18.1%)
1911 (%)	59,549 (47.0%)	48,739 (23.0%)	37,507 (17.8%)	10,775 (5.1%)	12,487 (5.9%)	(1.2%)
1921 (%)	136,823 (43.0%)	78,959 (24.0%)	53,428 (17.0%)	14,547 (4.7%)	14,293 (4.6%)	(6.7%)
1931 (%)	180,108 (43.0%)	94,742 (22.5%)	82,405 (19.7%)	19,896 (4.7%)	19,317 (4.6%)	(5.5%)

Source: C F Yong, Tan Kah Kee: The Making of an Overseas Chinese Legend, p. 130.

Straits Chinese British Association

The English-educated Straits Chinese, on the other hand, had become more and more pro-Britain and anglicized and aimed to be the King's Chinese. On 17 August 1900, they founded the Straits Chinese British Association (SCBA) as their power base with expressed loyalty to the British Empire.¹⁶ Members of the first committee included prominent Straits Chinese such as Lee Keng Liat (President), Tan Chay Yan (Vice-President), Tan Jiak Kim and so on. Later Seah Lian Seah, Lim Boon Keng also became officers of the Association.

When Queen Victoria passed away in January 1901, the SCBA promptly sent an emotional telegram to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London expressing their deep mourning "for the loss of our

beloved Queen."¹⁷ In February 1906, in an address to the visiting Prince Arthur of Connaught, the SCBA pointed out that, "as the representatives of British subjects of Chinese descent in the British Malaya, the Association was conscious of the liberties and privileges of British rule and wished to express its loyalty and devotion to the British throne."¹⁸ In 1924 and 1932, Legislative Council by direct representation for the Association.¹⁹ During the imminent Japanese invasion of Malaya and Singapore, many of the SCBA members enrolled in the Chinese Company of the Volunteers assisting in the defence of Singapore.²⁰ They expressed publicly their loyalty and allegiance to the British throne and actively advocated local political, educational and social reforms especially for the Straits Chinese.²¹ In 1926, Legislative Councillor Tan Cheng Lock who was also the president of SCBA (Malacca) spoke of his desire for a united self-governing Malaya.²² Unlike their pioneer forefathers, they were indifferent towards *bang* politics and not active in *bang* organizations and clan associations. By and large, they drifted away from the mainstream of Chinese society dominated by the immigrant Chinese.

Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce

The formation of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce (SCCC) in 1906 was a watershed in the development of *bang* politics in Singapore. The SCCC institutionalized the *bang* structure at the community level. It was designed to safeguard the interests of the Chinese business community, but in practice, it functioned as the highest power base of the Chinese community right from the outset. The Chinese power base had hitherto been at the Hokkien Huay Kuan, but since 1906 the Chinese leadership role had been taken over by the SCCC.

The formation of the SCCC was also a milestone in the realignment of the immigrant Chinese in Singapore in response to the incorporation of the SCBA. The SCCC was initiated and supported by the Qing government. In late 1905, a Penang and Deli millionaire Zhang Zhenxun, the Qing government's first imperial commissioner to inspect commercial affairs overseas, toured Southeast Asia to promote overseas Chinese investments in China. At a meeting with Singapore Chinese traders and merchants at Thong Chai Medical Institution, he persuaded them to establish a Chinese Chamber of Commerce. His suggestion was overwhelmingly accepted, and on April 6,

1906, the SCCC was formally established and exempted from registration under the Societies Ordinance. It was also registered in China. It aimed at uniting all Chinese traders and merchants in Singapore, sharing business information among members, mediating settlement over disputes, and making representations on government policies to the authorities concerned.²³ It was well supported by Chinese trading houses, and almost all well-known Chinese traders and merchants in Singapore joined the SCCC as members. Due to its broad representations of the Chinese business class, the SCCC had been the de facto leader of the Singapore Chinese community.

The *bang*-based organizational structure of the SCCC was designed to avoid being dominated by any one *bang*.²⁴ Initially, it was managed by a president, vice-president, 10 councillors, and 40 members of the management committee. The president and vice-president were to be a Hokkien and a Cantonese, alternatively.²⁵ The seats of councillors and management committee members allocated to Hokkien and Guangdong *bangs* were as follows:

	Hokkien	Guangdong
Councillors	4	6
Committee Members	16	24
Total	20	30

The Guangdong *bang* was made up of the Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka and Hainanese *bangs*. The whole organizational structure seems to maintain the basic feature of the united front *bang* politics of the 19th century. The Hokkien *bang* was again confronted by the united front of the smaller *bangs*, which were collectively known as the Guangdong *bang*. In contrast to the 19th century *bang* situation, however, the SCCC provided a forum for various *bangs* to engage each other in intra- and inter-*bang* communications.

According to the 1906 provisional constitution, there were two types of membership, namely, corporate member and individual member. Membership at this stage was also extended to Chinese business concerns and businessmen in the British Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, Sarawak, Siam, etc. The annual subscription fees for the corporate member and 1906–1907 is listed in Table 4.

Table 4: SCCC's membership by *bang* in 1906–1907

Bang	Corporate	Individual	Sub-total
Hokkien	371	453	824
Cantonese	100	110	210
Teochew	393	244	637
Hainanese	44	428	472
Hakka (Jiaying)	19	16	35
Sub-total	927	1251	2178
Others (non-Singapore)	101	307	408
Total	1028	1558	2586

Source: Roll of Donors and Annual Membership Subscription for 1906–1907, SCCC, 1908.

The SCCC had a total of 2,586 founding members, including 408 regional (non-Singapore) corporate and individual members. As for Singapore members, there were 2,178 comprising 927 corporate members and 1,251 individual members respectively. The Hokkien *bang* with 824 members was the largest component, followed by the Guangdong *bang* which was sub-divided into Teochew (637), Hainanese (472), Cantonese (210) and Hakka (35) *bangs*. It is interesting to note that the Guangdong *bang*'s collective membership totalled 1,354 and thus outnumbered Hokkien *bang*'s 824. However, in practice the Hokkien *bang* was always the dominant force in this highest body of the Singapore Chinese society, not only because the Hokkiens were economically stronger but also due to the structural weakness in the united front which comprised such a diverse grouping. It required enormous efforts and an extremely strong leadership to pull all the factions to work together. The usual jealousy, suspicion and desire to be independent took their toll. To illustrate, only a year after the establishment of the SCCC, the Hakka sub-group, which was originally incorporated into the Teochew *bang* mainly because the Dabu district was administratively managed by the Chaozhou prefecture, demanded a separate seat to safeguard its interests as a sub-Hakka group. The demand was granted, and a Dabu seat was created at the expense of the Teochew *bang*.²⁶

The SCCC's organizational structure reinforced the *bang* structure of the Chinese community. Each *bang* elected its allocated number of representatives into the governing body. Each member, either corporate or individual, had equal voting rights and was given one vote. Voting was by secret and anonymous ballot to ensure impartiality and avoid casting ballots

based on personal relationships (*guanxi*). The decision-making process was democratic and the majority ruled. If the issues concerned disputes between the Hokkien and Guangdong *bangs*, the meeting was to be called by the president and vice-president, and members of the Hokkien and Guangdong attending the meeting were to be equal. This rule was not applicable to other non-*bang*-sensitive issues.²⁷

The overthrow of the Qing dynasty in 1911 injected Chinese politics into the Chinese society in Singapore. The SCCC, being initiated by the Qing government, was slow in acknowledging the political change in China. This prompted the rising Tung Meng Hui (predecessor of Guomindang) leaders led by Teo Eng Hock and Tan Chor Lam to form a rival Chinese Merchants General Chamber of Commerce (CMGCC) in 1912.²⁸ Significantly, the revolutionary new chamber of commerce also adopted an organizational structure based on *bang* lines. The elected 60-member council consisted of 24 members from the Hokkien community, 17 Teochew, 9 Cantonese, 7 Hakka and 3 Hainanese members.²⁹ C. F. Yong observed that many of these council members being shopkeepers and businessmen were "generally less financially affluent as compared to the SCCC office-bearers."³⁰ The competing chambers sided with the rival political forces in China. The Guomindang-controlled CMGCC supported Sun Yat-sen while the SCCC backed President Yuan Shih-kai. In October 1913, the pro-Yuan SCCC gained the upper hand, and the Yuan Shih-kai's government ordered the dissolution of the CMGCC which "eventually fizzled out in August 1914 when the KMT (Guomindang) in Singapore dissolved itself under the pressure from both the Chinese and local authorities".³¹ Yong concluded that the episode made the Chinese community in Singapore and Malaya more politicized and helped create a pro-China or China-oriented tradition for succeeding generations.³² This was the first attempt to reform the conservative SCCC, but it was in vain.

The SCCC soon regained its status as the highest body in the Chinese society in Singapore. To show that it took heed of the call for reform, the Republican China's chamber of commerce act. The term of office for the council was changed to two years from one year. In addition, the councillors were replaced by 6 extraordinary members, and the number of seats in the management committee was reduced to 32 from 52. The allocation was as follows:³³ Hokkien 13 and Guangdong 19. The breakdown of the allocation of seats to the individual *bangs* within the umbrella Guangdong *bang* was as follows: Teochew 9, Cantonese 5, Hakka (Jiaying) 2,

Hainanese 2 and Dabu 1. After the restructuring, the cumber-some *bang*-based organizational structure remained unchanged. The top posts of Guangdong *bangs* in rotation. Due to the membership strength of the Hokkien and Teochew *bangs*, they virtually monopolized these two posts. The capable individuals and lesser *bang* leaders were deprived of their rights as well as opportunities to lead the SCCC.³⁴

During the first two decades of the 20th century, we saw the polarized *bang* structure take a new form shaped by two basic contending political forces: The British colonial government and the Qing and later Republican Chinese government. Unlike the 19th century *bang* politics whereby the overpowering Hokkien *bang* confronted the united front of the Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka and Hainanese *bangs*, the early 20th century saw the emergence of two highly politicized groupings. On the one hand, the Straits Chinese, English-educated, loyal to the British throne and advocates of Western cultural values, were the promoters of English language and English education as provided by the British colonial government. The SCBA was their power base. On the other hand, the migrant Chinese were Chinese-educated and dialect-speaking, identified with politics in China and subscribed to Chinese cultural values. They formed the backbone of Chinese education and *bang* politics. They also had close links with the government and political parties in China. The SCCC was the highest body for this group. Both the SCCC and SCBA positioned themselves as the rightful spokesman for the Chinese community and the Straits Chinese community in Singapore, respectively.

The legitimate social roles of the SCBA and the SCCC were endorsed by the British colonial government. In many official functions, the presidents and vice-presidents of the SCBA and SCCC were invited as representatives of the Straits Chinese community and the Singapore Chinese community, respectively. For example, on the occasion of Singapore's centenary celebration ceremony on 6 February 1919, the address from the SCCC began as follows:

On the occasion of the celebration of the Centenary of this important outpost of the British Empire, which has been so aptly described as "the key of the East," we, the representatives of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, on behalf of the Chinese community of Singapore, desire to.³⁵

At the same function, the SCBA address categorically indicated that they represented the Straits Chinese community of Singapore:

We, the representatives of the Straits Chinese British Association, a body composed of Straits Chinese British subjects.... In doing so, we venture on behalf of the Straits Chinese community of Singapore to express.³⁶

A new ballgame in *bang* politics arose during the first two decades of the 20th century. Generally there was neither much interaction and collaboration nor conflict at a higher level between the Straits Chinese and the migrant Chinese communities. Nonetheless, a few prominent Straits Chinese leaders took an active part in *bang* activities such as Lim Boon Keng (SCCC and Hokkien Huay Kuan councillor), Tan Boo Liat (SCCC councillor, president of Thian Hock Keng), Lee Cheng Yan (Thian Hock Keng councillor) and See Teong Wah (president of the SCCC and Hokkien Huay Kuan). At another level within the migrant Chinese community, the SCCC, among other things, provided a formal forum and channel to resolve inter-*bang* conflicts through arbitration and consultation. The *bang* representatives were required to consult their respective clan association (*huiguan*) for directives on *bang* positions on various issues, and they would voice or vote on the subjects accordingly. The clan association could vote members out if any of them did not toe the line.

Bang Politics on the Ground

While the affluent business and community elites dominated such *bang* organizations as territorial, kinship and trade associations as well as the structured social organizations. Generally they were not members but operated a smaller exclusive socio-economic unit based on lines of kinship, dialect and trade. For instance, the clansmen from the Huian and Yunxiao counties, Fujian, had congregated around Tanjong Pagar since the mid-19th century. The clansmen of the He, Zhuang and Zhang, who all came from the same county Hui-an in Fujian, lived side by side in Duxton Road, Duxton Hill and Craig Road.³⁷ The single clan lineage social structure of coolie-keng (workers' quarters) to shelter the bachelor clansmen there. The Hes, Zhuangs and Zhangs were mostly rickshaw pullers, and they had

clearly demarcated areas of operations. To strengthen their positions, through their coolie keng networks they formed links with secret societies to protect their business and clan interests. However, inter- and intra-clan conflicts arising from occupational competition were inevitable. Serious clashes between the Hes and Zhangs took place in 1909 and between the Hes and Zhuangs in 1936.³⁸

In pre-war Singapore, the Singapore River was an important economic and trading artery. The twakows (or lighters) and tongkangs (or barges) moored along the quays and jetties of the Singapore River to unload cargoes from ships anchored in the outer roads of the harbour and take on fresh cargoes for these ships. Since the 19th century, the Hokkiens and the Teochews had monopolized the twakow business in the Singapore River. These Hokkien and Teochew twakow owners and workers carefully marked out their areas of operation and guarded their territories and jetties with the assistance of secret societies such as Sin Ghi Hin, Sin Kongsi and the like.³⁹ Serious fights between rival Hokkien and Teochew boatmen broke out in 1906 and in the 1920s and 1930s.⁴⁰ In these inter-*bang* conflicts, *bang* leaders were often called upon to mediate. The Inspector-General's Office reported the 1906 riot as follows:

Until the 13th November last the Settlement was free from any Disturbances. On that date a quarrel took place in the river between some Hokkien and Teochew boatmen which culminated in a series of disturbances...The President and members of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce both Hokkiens and Teochews deserve the greatest credit for the ready assistance which they rendered us by going from house to house, speaking to the people and getting them to open their shops and thus restoring confidence.⁴¹

In another case, on 15 September 1923, the police reported a serious fight between the Hock Chia and Heng Hwa rickshaw coolies in Queen Street and the neighbourhood. The fight was due to "a dispute over the occupation of stands outside various hotels."⁴²

The workers who were mostly new immigrants had to struggle for survival so the *bang* politics of the working class was understandably closely linked to occupational competition and monopoly. These intra- and inter-*bang* conflicts often led to violent fights and riots between rival *bangs* even between different lineage groups of the same clan.

Consolidation and Restructuring of Bang Organizations

The Guomindang unified China in 1927, and the Chinese overseas overwhelmingly applauded the Guomindang's achievement. The branch of Guomindang and Guomindang-linked organizations and groups in Singapore were perceived as modernizing socio-political forces. Hence, despite Straits Settlements governments' hostility and repression from 1925 to 1930,⁴³ the Guomindang influence in *bang* politics was increasingly felt. The most significant development was the consolidation and restructuring of various *bang* organizations from 1929 to 1937.

Consolidation of Teochew and Hakka Communities

Since its foundation around 1845, the property-rich charity organization Ngee Ann Kongsi had been the power base for the Teochews in Singapore. Its chairmanship from 1845 to 1928 had been monopolized by the family of Seah Eu Chin. In September 1928, a local senior Guomin-dang leader Lim Nee Soon led a campaign to force the influential Seah family to hand over the properties of the Ngee Ann Kongsi to the Teochew community. On September 15, 1928, Nee Soon and other Teo-chew community leaders formed a provisional committee to set up the Teochew Huay Kuan. In addition, the 8 counties of the Chaozhou prefecture were to nominate 2 representatives to serve on the committee. In March 1929, the Teochew Poit Ip Huay Kuan was formally established with Lim Nee Soon as the founding chairman. In September 1929, a seven-man committee headed by Lim Nee Soon was formed to deal with the Seah family regarding the properties of the Ngee Ann Kongsi. Both sides reached an amicable agreement under which the Ngee Ann Kongsi would be restructured with a new constitution and a new management committee. The new management committee under the fresh constitution was formed in April 1930 with Nee Soon as the first chairman. Seah family's representative, Seah Eng Tiong handed over to the new management committee all cash and business records due to the Ngee Ann Kongsi, and he remained as a member of the restructured management committee.⁴⁴

Coincidentally, the Hakka General Association was also officially established in Singapore around the same time in August 1929 to unite all Hakkas in Southeast Asia. The need to have such an umbrella organization was first felt in 1923, and it was then proposed by the Ying Fo Wui Kwun

(Yinghe Association, Jiaying group) and Fong Yun Thai Association (Feng Yong Da Group) at a public meeting. The meeting resolved that a Hakka General Association was to be set up. Soon efforts to raise funds were initiated but without much success. In 1926 it found two keen supporters, the famous legendary Tiger Balm Kings. The Aw brothers later became business had been well established in Burma. In 1923, having realized Singapore's strategic location as a centre of regional entrepot trade in Southeast Asia as well as the regional centre for the Chinese overseas community, the Aw brothers moved their family business to Singapore. In 1926, Aw brothers' factory in Neil Road began to mass-produce its Tiger Balm products. At the same time they were looking for a base or platform to build up their personal and corporate images as caring, civic-minded entrepreneurs and social leaders in Singapore. The Hakka General Association project had provided them a golden opportunity to achieve these goals. They immediately grasped the opportunity and contributed generously towards the building fund. When the general association was officially inaugurated at the newly completed building in August 1929, it was named the Nanyang Khek Community Guild with Aw Boon Haw as the founding president. It indicated that he had ambitions to become a regional *bang* leader. From 1928, he was contesting with another equally prominent Hokkien *bang* leader, Tan Kah Kee, in the Shantung Relief Fund campaign and subsequent China Relief Fund committees. It is amazing to note that intra- and inter-*bang* competition and rivalry speeded up the consolidation process of the Teochew and Hakka *bang* organizations in late 1920s and early 1930s.

Restructuring of the SCCC and Hokkien Huay Kuan

Tan Kah Kee was a social reformer. He was not a member of the Guomindang. Nevertheless, he rejoiced over the unification of China by the Guomindang and admired its government's efficient committee system whereby each committee member was assigned specific duties. So in early 1929, he set out to reform the SCCC and the Hokien Huay Kuan along the lines of Guomindang's committee system.

On 4 February 1929, Tan published an important article entitled "A Proposal to Form a Chinese Association and to Reform the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce" in the *Nanyang Siang Pau*.⁴⁵ He criticized

the council system under which the councillors were not given portfolio and proposed to replace it with a committee system adopted by the Guomindang government, under which office-bearers were "assigned to various and specific committees which were answerable to the Chamber."⁴⁶ He also attacked the *bang*-based election system and called for its abolition.⁴⁷ He was of the view that the SCCC only represented the interests of the Chinese business community and suggested that a central organization, the Chinese Assembly Hall or Chinese Association, be formed to represent the entire Chinese society. He later held a public meeting in the Ee Hoe Hean Club to lobby for support and with 14 others wrote to the SCCC, calling for a general meeting to be convened. At the SCCC council meeting held on 13 February, his proposal was dismissed by the conservative council led by the (Teochew) President Lee Wee Nam on the grounds of procedural irregularity because, as a member of the SCCC, Tan should have tabled his proposal for discussion at the council meeting instead of campaigning in the press and public meeting.⁴⁸

In 1930, the Guomindang and pro-Guomindang members of the Chamber captured leadership in the SCCC council election and made a pro-Guomindang Hokkien leader, Lee Choon Seng, the new SCCC president.⁴⁹ The new committee refused to perform the traditional ceremony of assuming office, which required them to light three joss sticks before an altar, and the outgoing committee refused to adopt the Guomindang form of ceremony, which required them making three bows to Dr Sun Yat-sen, reading his will and observing silence for three minutes.⁵⁰ The dispute over differences in cultural values and political ideology between the old guards who rejected change and modernization and the politically motivated Pro-Guomindang group who acted as the agent of change. A compromise was reached to break the deadlock. Two ceremonies were arranged. Both parties performed the set of rituals they deemed fit.

Tan Kah Kee's efforts in modernizing Hokkien Huay Kuan's organizational structure could be traced back to 1927 when he led a campaign to rally support from the Hokkiens in Singapore to improve the management and funding of two Hokkien-run primary schools, Tao Nan School and Ai Tong School. In June and July 1927, he presided over two public meetings at the Hokkien Huay Kuan to lobby for the schools to be placed under the direct supervision of the Hokkien Huay Kuan. At the second meeting on 16 July, a 12-man committee was formed to restructure the Hokkien Huay Kuan. The then chairman of the Hokkien Huay Kuan,

See Tiong Wah, who was a comprador of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank, was not receptive to change and was absent at the second meeting. His reluctance to reorganise the Huay Kuan prompted Tan Kah Kee to challenge him in the 1929 election of the council of Hokkien Huay Kuan.⁵¹ Tan Kah Kee was elected chairman by the 40 councillors. His immediate task was to reform the outdated organizational setup. At the first meeting on 2 February 1929, he announced that the council system would be changed to committee system.⁵² Under the new committee system there would be a 5-member supervisory committee and a 35-member executive committee comprising five departments.

Strengthening of Group Identity: The Guangdong *Bang*

The trend towards larger umbrella associations among *bang* organizations continued in the 1930s despite the Great Depression. The formation of the Singapore Kwangtung Hui Kuan (Guangdong General Association) in 1937 was the climax of this movement in pre-war Singapore. It manifested the solidarity of all major dialect groups from Guangdong province, namely, Cantonese, Teochews, Hainanese and Hakkas. It practically revived the old spirit of the united front of the 19th century. However, it was not a federation of lesser *bangs* since there was no corporate or institutional membership. Membership was open to individuals only. It was amazing to note that since its inception almost all the office-bearers were prominent leaders of each *bang*, but they joined the association in their personal capacity. Nevertheless, they formed an important interlocking leadership network, which could be a major pressure group to be reckoned with if they were to take concerted action. The founding chairman was Lee Wee Nam (president of Teochew Poit Ip Huay Kuan and former president of SCCC). However, the potential for being a significant social force was never explored, and thus it has never become a power base for the component *bangs*. Due to diverse *bang* interests, the association has remained a marginal social organization. It had become glaringly obvious that during the China salvation movement, the relief fund campaigns were conducted through respective dialect-based *bang* organizations, and the Guangdong General Association played very little role in this important movement.

The Sino-Japanese War and Chinese Nationalism, 1937-1941

The Marco Polo Bridge Incident on July 7, 1937 marked Japan's full-scale aggression in China. The reaction of the Chinese overseas in Southeast Asia was spontaneous and strong. The China salvation movement and the boycott of Japanese goods launched since the Jinan Incident in 1928 were intensified. In July 1937, the Secretary for Chinese Affairs reported that soon after settlements in his *Monthly Review of Chinese Affairs* reported that soon after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, various Chinese Chambers of Commerce and other Chinese associations in Singapore and Malaya like Muar, Selangor and Kedah called for public meetings and large-scale fund-raising campaign for the relief of refugees and wounded soldiers in North China.⁵³ At a committee meeting held on July 15, 1937, the SCCC resolved "that a telegram be sent to General Chiang Kai Shek informing him of the indignation among overseas Chinese at the aggression of the Japanese in North China and urging him not to give in but to take drastic measures against the enemy."⁵⁴ It also resolved that a public meeting would be held "to discuss the raising of fund for the relief of wounded soldiers and war refugees in North China" and urged Chinese associations to nominate representatives to attend the public meeting.⁵⁵ The Straits Settlements government was greatly alarmed and promptly issued a communiqué warning the Chinese and Japanese residents in the colony that "should there be an outbreak of hostilities in North China, they must take no action that may lead to a breach of the peace in the colony."⁵⁶ It also warned that the government would not hesitate to take action "against anyone who stirs up trouble, as it is an essential condition of residence in the Colony that every immigrant race shall be prepared to live at peace with every other... The organized collection of funds for remission to China or Japan for military purposes will not be tolerated."⁵⁷ Upon the government's objection, the SCCC called off the proposed public meeting. However, Japan's attack on Shanghai in August 1937 had further aroused Chinese nationalism of the Chinese overseas from all walks of life. The colonial government eventually relented and allowed the SCCC to reconvene a public rally on August 15.⁵⁸ Its attention now turned to choose a strong but manageable leader to lead the China relief fund, and Tan Kah Kee was the man instead of the president of the SCCC, Tan Chin Hian, a Teochew.⁵⁹

Following the public rally at the Chamber on 15 August, the Singapore China Relief Fund Committee (SCRFC) was immediately formed. Its organizational structure and operation were organized along *bang* lines.

Thirty-one elected executive members of the SCRFC chaired by Tan Kah Kee comprised 14 Hokkien, 9 Teochew, 4 Cantonese, 2 Hakka, 1 Hainanese and 1 Sanjiang *bang* leaders. They were assigned to serve in five departments: Treasury, General Affairs, Auditing, Public Relations and Fund-raising. In the most important Fund-raising Department, there were 6 *bang* committees, each headed by *bang* leaders as chairman and vice-chairman: Hau Say Huan (Hokkien), Lee Wee Nam and Yeo Chan Boon (Teochew), Chin Kee Sun and Fu Mun Chew (Cantonese), Lim Sih Ban (Hakka), Quek Shin (Hainanese) and Yang Sheng Hwa (Sanjiang).⁶⁰ The chairmen of the *bang* committees could co-opt other clansmen and *bang* leaders into their committees. The *bang* committees then mapped out their fund-raising work plans and strategies using the *bang* networks. Such activities ranged from monthly donation, variety shows, drama performances, sales of flowers and flags to charity games, sports and so on.

The fund-raising efforts of the Hokkien *bang* were centrally co-ordinated by the Hokkien Huay Kuan. Hokkien rubber tycoons and bankers were very supportive of Tan Kah Kee, a fellow Hokkien *bang* leader. For example, Tan Kah Kee donated \$2,000 (in Chinese currency) per month,⁶¹ Tan Lark Sye, \$5,000, Lee Kong Chian, \$100,000 and Yap Geok Twee, \$100,000.⁶² The Singapore Chinese Rubber Dealers' Association led by Lee Kong Chian and Tan Lark Sye donated from 1937 to 1941 a total of \$1.29 million.⁶³ The less-well-off fellow Hokkien workers were urged to donate a portion of their wages every month.

The Teochew *bang* also used the Teochew (Poit Ip) Huay Kuan as a central body to co-ordinate its fund-raising activities. *Bang* leaders like Tan Chin Hean (SCCC president) and Lee Wee Nam made big donations towards the fund. It divided Singapore into 8 zones, and all donations made by Teochew *bang* organizations, kinship organizations and corporations within each zone were credited to the central account under the name of the Teochew (Poit Ip) Huay Kuan, which, in turn, would submit the consolidated fund to SCRFC as a collective donation made by the Teochew *bang*.

The Cantonese *bang*, being without an umbrella organization, rallied behind the Hoi Tin Club to spearhead its fund-raising activities. "They evolved the device of 'relief boxes' as a means of collection from the takings of Cantonese hawkers and businesses. They set up stores to sell commodities at various strategic points in the city with proceeds being channelled into the Hoi Tin Club for China relief."⁶⁴ They also staged plays and operas to raise funds and started a monthly collection from Cantonese

workers of a fixed percentage of their salaries for the relief fund.⁶⁵ Similarly, the Hakka, Hainanese and Sanjiang *bangs* rallied behind their own general associations to mobilise their clansmen to raise money for the relief fund.

From August to October 1937, the SCRFC had raised a total of \$2.28 million, exceeding Tan Kah Kee's initial estimate of \$2 million. The breakdown was as follows:

Hokkiens	\$1,280,500
Teochews	350,000
Cantonese	426,000
Sankiang	78,750
Hakkas	73,000
Hainanese	72,000 ⁶⁶

By the end of 1937, the relief fund stood at more than \$3 million.⁶⁷

China Relief Fund Committees were also formed in every major city and town throughout Southeast Asia. To better co-ordinate and promote China Relief Fund activities in Southeast Asia, the South Seas China Relief Fund Union (SCRFU) was set up in Singapore on October 15, 1938 as a central body. Tan Kah Kee was elected as its chairman. Apart from raising funds, the SCRFU also recruited some 3,000 Chinese mechanics who volunteered to work on the Burma Road in 1939. Though a Straits Chinese China Relief Fund Committee was formed to promote fund-raising activities among the Straits Chinese through organizing popular drama and musical shows,⁶⁸ the majority of the Straits Chinese were indifferent to China-oriented campaigns.

The China Relief Fund campaigns, on the one hand, effectively used the *bang* networks to mobilise the Chinese in Singapore to raise funds in support of China's fight against Japan's aggression. It considerably strengthened *bang* consciousness and *bang* solidarity as the pride of the *bang* patriotic overtones and the sense of national crisis had effectively promoted an awareness of Chinese national identity and the obligation to save China from foreign invasion among the immigrant Chinese communities. In addition, the China relief fund activities brought the Chinese in Singapore and in the region closer to each other. Chinese nationalism was rising, and, for the first time, a pan-Chinese movement in Southeast Asia was in the landscapes in Southeast Asia and in China after the war ended this pan-Chinese movement and Chinese nationalism.

Concluding Remarks

Bang organizations were key grassroots organizations in colonial and early post-Independent Singapore. They were indeed the pillars of the Chinese immigrant society. Through vertical and horizontal intra- and inter-*bang* relations and activities, the *bang* organizations and their leaders formed a chain of powerful social and economic networks.

The *bang* politics Chinese immigrant society in 19th century Singapore was highly polarized and confrontational as well as being inward looking, exclusive and protective. The alignment and realignment of Chinese society were based on the principle of balance of power. In the first half of the 19th century, the immigrant Chinese faced great adversity. They were publicly denounced by the Qing government. The colonial government offered no job protection and social welfare services. They were left to fend for themselves and felt insecure and helpless. So the smaller *bangs* grouped together to form a united front against the overpowering Hokkien *bang*. *Bang* consciousness and unity were strong in this phase. Towards the later half of the 19th century, the changing political and economic developments in Qing China and colonial Singapore had turned adversity into opportunity for the immigrant Chinese. They were now hotly courted by the British colonial government, the Qing government, the Chinese Re-formists and the Revolutionaries. The immigrant Chinese "rediscovered" their roots and gained the confidence to redefine their destiny. The Straits Chinese also redefined their vision and destiny. Confrontational and polarized *bang* politics took on a more mature and conciliatory outlook.

When Singapore entered the 20th century, neo-polarized *bang* politics emerged at two levels. Chinese society was split into a pro-British, English-educated and anglicized Straits Chinese community and a pro-China, Chinese-educated and dialect-speaking immigrant community. The social schism added a politico-cultural dimension to *bang* politics. The colonial government favored the Straits Chinese community while containing the immigrant Chinese community. At another level, the immigrant Chinese institutionalized the polarized but collaborative *bang* politics by founding an umbrella trade association, the SCCC, within which the Hokkien *bang* was challenged by a more structured and concerted Guangdong *bang*.

The *bang*-based interlocking networks had also been a crucial stabilizing force, especially at times of crisis. They provided social protection and social control for the immigrant Chinese. The Straits Settlements government effectively implemented its indirect rule by tapping the *bang* leaders'

influences in the society to maintain law and order. The outbreak of war between Japan and China in 1937 united the immigrant Chinese in Singapore and in Southeast Asia. Through the *bang*-based networks, they effectively mobilized the Chinese in Singapore and Southeast Asia to rally behind the South Seas China Relief Fund Union to help China fight the war. *Bang* politics was thus given a new patriotic meaning that gave rise to Chinese nationalism and a pan-Chinese movement in Southeast Asia on the eve of the Pacific War.

Notes

1. T. J. Newbold, *Political and Statistical Account of the British Settlements in the Straits of Malacca* (London: John Murray, 1839), p. 2, cited in Saw Swee Hock, *The Population of Singapore* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1999, Reprint), p. 8.
2. Cheng Lim-Keak, *Social Change and the Chinese in Singapore* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1985), p. 23. C. F. Yong, *Tan Kah-Kee: The Making of an Overseas Chinese Legend* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 128–9.
3. Charles Burton Buckley, "An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore 1819–1867" (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984, 3rd reprint), p. 83.
4. Cheng, *Social change and the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 28.
5. For a detailed discussion of changing patterns of *bang* politics in the 19th century, see Lim How Seng, *Xinjiapo huashe yu huashang* [Singapore Chinese Community and Entrepreneurs] (Singapore: Singapore Society of Asian Studies, 1999, Reprint), esp. chapter 1.
6. Cheng Jinghe and Tan Yeok Seong, *Xinjiapo huawen beiming jilu* [A collection of Singapore Chinese Inscriptions] (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 1972), p. 225.
7. Among others, the most influential Hokkien *bang* leaders in the 19th century were Si Hoo Keh (1793–1874), Tan Tock Seng (1798–1850), Tan Kim Seng (1805–1864), and Cheang Hong Lim (1825–1893).
8. Lim, *Xinjiapo huashe yu huashang*, chap. 1.
9. Wen Chung-chi, "The Nineteenth Century Imperial Chinese Consulate in the Straits Settlements," (Unpublished MA thesis, University of Singapore, 1964); Lim How Seng, "Huashe kongzhiquan zi zheng: Qing lingshi yu Yingguo guangyuan de jiufeng" [Control of the Chinese in Singapore:

Conflicts between Qing Consuls and Straits Settlements Government] in Lim, *Xinjiapo huashe yu huashang*, pp. 63–85

10. These leaders included Tan Kim Ching, Cheang Hong Lim, Khoo Seok Wan, Lee Cheng Yan, Low Kim Pong, Eu Tong Seng, Zhang Zhenxun, Wong Ah Fook and many more. See Yen Ching-hwang (Chang Ching (1877–1912), "Sales of Qing titles and Singapore Chinese leadership Singapore Chinese] (Singapore: Association of the Graduates of Nanyang University, 1972), Appendices, pp. 71–87.
11. *Xingzhou Shanshu ji* [Petition from Singapore] (Shanghai: n.p., 1899), pp. 1–8; Song, *One Hundred Years' History in Singapore*, p. 313.
12. *Xinzhou Shanshu ji*, pp. 1–8.
13. Among the objectives were (1) To promote among the members an intelligent interest in the affairs of the British Empire, and to encourage and maintain their loyalty as subjects of the Queen; (2) To afford facilities for the discussion of all questions relating to the social, intellectual and moral welfare of the Chinese British subjects in the colony; (3) To promote the general welfare of the Chinese British subjects in any other lawful or constitutional manner; (4) To appoint a representative committee in London to watch the interests of the Association. (5) To take any requisite lawful step for the defence of the rights and privileges of British subjects. See Song, *One Hundred Years' History in Singapore*, pp. 319–320.
14. Straits Settlements Despatch to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 19.1.1901. Cited in Lee Yong Hock, *A History of the Straits Chinese British Association (1900–1959)* (Unpublished BA (Hons) academic exercise, Department of History, University of Malaya, Singapore, 1960), p. 18.
15. Lee, *A History of the Straits Chinese British Association*, p. 21.
16. Ibid., p. 47.
17. Ibid., pp. 60–1.
18. Ibid., pp. 17–63.
19. Ibid., p. 49.
20. *Provisional Constitution of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of commerce*, 1906. 1. Hereafter cited as 1906 SCCC Constitution.
21. Cheng, *Social Change and the Chinese in Singapore*, p. 24.
22. 1906 SCCC Constitution, p. 3.
23. *The Souvenir Magazine of the 60th Anniversary of the SCCC*, (1966), pp. 173, 241. Hereafter cited as Souvenir SCCC 1966.
24. 1906 SCCC Constitution, p. 5.