

Singapore Clan Associations

Clan associations were established by Chinese immigrants who arrived in Singapore during the 19th and 20th centuries. What purposes did these organisations serve then and now?

Background history



Chinese immigrants who arrived here faced difficulties in finding work and shelter, and in communication as they could only speak their dialects.



For aid and protection, the immigrants banded together. This led to the formation of the clan associations

The first clan association established in Singapore was Cho Kah Koon¹. It was founded in 1819² for Cantonese migrants surnamed Cho.

Today, the Hokkien community³ is the largest Chinese dialect group in Singapore. The Hokkien Huay Kuan is also the largest clan association⁴ here, with over 5000⁴ members.



Classification

Clan associations are classified into 3 broad types:

Locality

Location of hometowns. Four major groups: Fujian, Guangdong, Hainan and Sanjiang.

Kinship

Same or different but related surnames

Trade

Type of trades

Functions of clan associations

In the past

- Aid in obtaining basic needs, e.g. shelter
- Officiated marriages
- Established schools, hospitals and temples
- Contact points with hometowns

In the present

- Promote Chinese culture and heritage to the younger generation
- Celebrate traditional festivals
- Facilitate community bonding and business networking

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³Conceicao, J. L. Hokkien Community. Singapore Infopedia, National Library Board. Retrieved from http://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_1498_2009-04-09.html?s=hokkien
⁴W. K. Leong. (2015). Hokkien clan group leaves Telok Ayer Street after 174 years. The Straits Times. Retrieved from <http://news.asiaone.com/news/singapore/hokkien-clan-group-leaves-telok-ayer-street-after-174-years>

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