

The Development of Cantonese Chinese Community in the Klang Valley, 1860-1941

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Abstract

This article traces the development process of the Cantonese community in the Klang Valley. As indicated in the local sources of the Chinese community history in this region, the Cantonese group, among other Chinese dialect groups, contributed significantly to the early development of Kuala Lumpur. They also rose as a dominant economic group among the Chinese community in the Klang Valley from the late 19th century to the mid 20th century. The Cantonese of Kuala Lumpur gradually replaced the Hakka group and emerged as the dominant group until the 1930s in both economic and social domains. In the process, the personal resources of group members, the organizational structure, the hierarchy within the Cantonese leadership, and the gender ratio were the four primary elements that impacted the growth of the Cantonese community. The Cantonese business elite took advantage of new economic opportunities such as the Chinese banking and real estate development. When the Chinese tin mining industry began to decline in 1914, these new business ventures sustained the overall Chinese economic system in the Klang Valley from the 1910s to 1920s. Along with the surge of the Cantonese economic strength, the hierarchical differentiation within the Cantonese community emerged, and some business elites started to shift their loyalty to the British. On the other hand, the Cantonese social elites from labour and middle classes actively participated in the political movement related to Mainland China. In the Klang Valley, the Cantonese leaders served as the mouthpiece for the Chinese community in dealing with the British colonial government. At the beginning of the 20th century, a group of gentry class businessmen emerged amid a new wave of Cantonese immigration. After the 1920s, they were accepted as the new leaders of the Cantonese community. When sub-ethnic integration began to take place among the Chinese, the Hokkien leadership gradually challenged the social leadership of the Cantonese elite.

Keywords: Cantonese community, Leader-hierarchy, Dialect Association, Straits Cantonese

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1.0 Introduction

The Cantonese dialect group is one of the major Chinese communities at Klang Valley, in Selangor. The Cantonese people, originated from the central area of Guangdong province in China, had emerged as the dominant group in the socio-economic domain within the Chinese community in the post-*Kapitan* era.

This article seeks to explore the roles played by the Cantonese group within the Chinese community in three phases of community development. It aims to explain how the Cantonese group surpassed the Hakkas to become the dominant group in the early 20th century. Moreover, it also discusses the factors that contributed to their leadership decline in the 1930s.

2.0 The Pro Phase of the Cantonese Community (1860-1887)

The Cantonese community consisted of new Chinese migrants from mainland China and Straits-born Cantonese from Penang and Singapore. Before the steamship routes opened from Macau, Hong Kong to Port Swettenham which started in 1887, the Cantonese mostly arrived at the Straits Settlements from the 1840s through the traditional routes via Guangzhou -Hong Kong - Singapore - Penang. The Cantonese migrants who settled in the Malay Peninsula made up only 23% of their total overseas migration from the 1840s to 1870s (Gong, 2003, 133-139). As a new migrant group among the overall Chinese community in the Malay Peninsula in 1879, they were under the control of the Penang Hokkien towkays in the Perak mining industry and the Hakka towkays in the similar industry in Negeri Sembilan.

In the early 1860s, after the Sungei Ujong war, Yap Ah Loy and his Fui Chiu Hakka groups moved from Negeri Sembilan to Kuala Lumpur. In this migration route, a few Cantonese followed the Fui Chiu Hakka group's path and settled in the Klang Valley. This group of Cantonese was estimated to be less than a hundred¹, and Chiew Yoke was the representative figure of this Cantonese community.

In the 1870s, the Cantonese were involved in the tin mining industry in the Larut region, Perak, led by Loke Yew and Chan Sow Lin. After the Larut War (1862-1874),

¹ The population data of the Cantonese population in the Klang Valley region in 1860s is estimated from the description on Chiew Yoke and his followers, in *The 70th Anniversary Souvenir Magazine of the Selangor Kwong Siew Association*, (雪隆广肇会馆 70 周年特刊), (1957, p.18).

the Cantonese who settled in this region were confined to their tin mining industries and revenue farming under the internal authoritarian control of Hakka *Kapitan Cina* Chong Keng Kwee. Simultaneously, tin mining development was flourishing in the Klang Valley after the Selangor civil war (1862-1873). Similarly, the surrounding areas of Kuala Lumpur thrived as it provided new opportunities for the Cantonese adventurers and pioneers to venture into new opportunities. Loke Yew and Chan Sow Lin together with his followers, then moved to the Klang Valley from Perak in a historical migration flow (1880-1883). The numbers were estimated between 100-150 (Liew, 2018, p.29).

These two Cantonese migration flows from Negeri Sembilan, and Perak made up the earliest Cantonese settlers in the Klang Valley. These inland migrants had earlier gone through international migration from mainland China to the Straits Settlements.

From the 1860s to 1870s, as a result of the gold rush in the American continent which attracted nearly 50% of the Cantonese migrants who originated from the four districts of Guangzhou Prefecture, the Malay Peninsula was not the main destination of the Cantonese. (Gong, 2003, p.8, 18, 108)

Table 1
The Destinations of the Cantonese Migrants in 1870

Destination	California	Canada	Hawaii	Malaya	Vietnam	Others
Migrants	2427	941	386	350	330	720
Percentage (%)	47.08	18.25	7.49	6.79	6.4	13.99

Source: Gong Bo Hong (2003, p.8, 18, 108, 217, 335)

Hakkas being the largest Chinese community in the Klang Valley made up more than 80% of the Chinese population in 1880 (Liew, 2010, pp.67-69). Hence the earliest Cantonese migrants decided to join the Fui Chiu Hakka groups organization and accepted the leadership of Hakka *Kapitan* Yap Ah Loy (Liew, 2010, pp.72-75). In this duration (1867-1885), the Cantonese towkay Chiew Yeok was one of the more active members in *Kapitan Cina* Yap Ah Loy's Fui Chiu *kongsi* house even though he was not a Hakka from the Fui Chiu prefecture.

The Cantonese set up their dialect organization comparatively much later than the other dialect groups which founded their dialect or district associations immediately after they arrived in the Klang Valley. The Cantonese group imitated the Hakkas in the economic domain and was under the control of the Selangor Fui Chiu Association and the *Kapitan Cina Yap Ah Loy*. In this situation, the Cantonese sacrificed their dialect

identity temporarily in the period between 1870 and 1880s, similar to a situation in Canada where the Cantonese minority subsumed their identity to a more dominant community for purposes of their economic survival. (Barth, 1969, pp.117-134).

3.0 The Growing Phase of the Cantonese Community (1887-1930)

With the introduction of direct steamships routes between Macau/Hong Kong and Port Swettenham, it was easier for the Cantonese to migrate to Malaya. Simultaneously, the impact and attractions of the gold rush in California and Canada had died down. As a result, news of opportunities in the tin mines of the Klang Valley became more attractive to the Cantonese migrants. Chan Wing, who later became one of the business tycoons in the Cantonese community, had planned to go to San Francisco to venture into gold mining. However, he was persuaded by the labour broker that there were many tin mines in the Klang Valley region, and the market prospects of the tin products were no less than the gold nuggets. The other important factor that changed Chan Wing's mind was the proximity in terms of distance of the Klang Valley compared to that of San Francisco. Affordability of transportation by the family was the turning point in the choice of destinations. (Chan, 1999, pp.12-13).

The direct steamship route was a major factor in bringing in more than 3000 Cantonese migrants from their ancestral hometown in China to settle in the Malay Peninsula in the late 1880s. It is through this second migration wave that Cantonese tycoons Chan Wing, Cheong Yoke Choy and Liew Weng Chee settled in the Klang Valley.

In the late 1880s, Cantonese migration increased dramatically from less than 300 in 1880 (Tan, 1997, p.69) to more than 2000 in 1887.² With this influx of people of the same dialect, Chiew Yeok and Chan Sow Lin decided to leave the Fui Chiu kongsi house. They established their dialect organization to satisfy the geo-emotional demand from the Cantonese newcomers. The Selangor Kwong Siew Association was founded by Chiew Yeok, Chan Sow Lin, Loke Yew and the Hakka elite Yap Kwan Seng (who originated from the Chih Xi district in Guangzhou prefecture) in 1887. This particular case illustrates:

- i. the need for a dialect group identity based on a common dialect and culture (Keyes, 1976, pp.202-213),
- ii. situations where one has more than one identity as demonstrated by Yap Kwan Seng, a Hakka but from a Cantonese prefecture, there was the

² The Cantonese population in 1887 is estimated from the data in 100th Years Anniversary Souvenir Magazine of the Selangor Kuala Lumpur Kwong Siew Association (雪隆广肇会馆 100 周年纪念特刊), (1987, p.17).

flexibility to maintain dual identities in both the dialect and geographical aspects (Keyes, 1976, pp.4-30).

When the Selangor Kwong Siew Association was established, more and more Cantonese were centralized in Kuala Lumpur, and they became an emerging force in the Chinese community in the Klang Valley. On the other hand, the power of the Hakka community which was the largest Chinese dialect community in the Klang Valley was weakened by in-fighting of Hakka sub-dialects of the Fui Chius and the Ka Yins which crippled the Hakka group.

On 3rd, July 1885, two years before the establishment of the Kwong Siew Association, the Cantonese towkay Chiew Yeok, due to his reputation and leadership ability, was appointed by the British Resident John P. Rodger as Chinese Magistrate solely for Chinese affairs. This appointment was in a proclamation by the Selangor Sultan Abdul Samad³.

Chiew Yeok served as the first president of the Selangor Kwong Siew Association which made him also the head of the Cantonese community. Chiew Yeok was well known in the Hakka community because his business partner was his in-law, the late Hakka *Kapitan Cina* Yap Ah Loy. Chiew Yoke possessed the basic requirements for the position of *Kapitan Cina*, which was the highest-ranking position for a Chinese leader in the late 19th century. However, circumstances prevented him from heading the Chinese community as the 4th *Kapitan Cina*. The British colonial government had other considerations in maintaining the “balance of power” between the dialects. Yap Ah Shak from the Hakka community, the larger group compared to the Cantonese, was instead appointed *Kapitan Cina* based on the representation of the larger dialect community. It is quite evident that dialect population was still a very relevant factor in the British consideration for the position of *Kapitan Cina*.

The 4th *Kapitan Cina*, Yap Ah Shak, a Hakka, who originated from Fui Chiu prefecture, passed on in 1889. The Cantonese elite and the Hakka elite competed fiercely for this vacant position. The Fui Chiu Hakka headman Yap Loong Hin, the Chih Xi Hakka leader Yap Kwan Seng and the Cantonese towkay Chiew Yeok were the three candidates vying to be Yap Ah Shak’s successor. Chiew Yeok had the support of the Cantonese community and also Yap Ah Loy’s relatives, while Yap Kwan Seng gained the endorsement from the Hakka community. Because the Hakkas were the largest group

³ Yap Ah Shak’s appointment on the position of *Kapitan Cina* in Selangor are referred to SSF 937/85 Proclamation of Sultan Abdul Samad of Selangor.

of the Chinese community, British Resident William Maxwell played the role of mediator. Because of Yap Kwan Seng having multiple role-attributes (dialect identity – Hakkas, geographical identity – Chih Xi district, Guangzhou prefecture), Maxwell considered him as acceptable by both the Cantonese and the Hakkas. Thus, Yap Kwan Seng was appointed *Kapitan Cina* in a proclamation by Selangor Sultan Abdul Samad. Simultaneously, Maxwell allocated a seat in the Selangor State Council to Chiew Yeok as the representative of the Chinese. Maxwell's decision was a compromise between the Hakka and the Cantonese communities. However, this might also be a strategy to have a balance of power between the opposition groups.

The council appointment of Chiew Yeok⁴ by the British, created a new means for the Cantonese community to participate in the public and political affairs of the British colonial authority in the Klang Valley. The route to having a say in the government to the Cantonese was through the British legislative and administrative bodies.

In the 1890s, the demand for qualified employees in new industries led to the immigration of another Cantonese group to the Klang Valley. Thirteen skilled workers in Guangzhou and Hong Kong for steel manufacturing were employed by Chan Sow Lin to work in his Man Lee factory in Ampang in 1894.⁵ When the Cantonese towkays like Loke Yew became involved in remittances and the construction of building projects, these industries had to come into contact with the British authorities. In 1890, Loke Chow Kit and Loke Chow Thye, two English-educated Cantonese were employed by Loke Yew (Liew, 2018, p.95) who did not have any formal education. Most of the English educated Straits-born Chinese were the Hokkiens, and a few of them were Cantonese. Loke Yew filled the gap for English-educated Cantonese by employing Straits-born Cantonese from Penang or Singapore, moving them into the Klang Valley. The Loke brothers (Chow Kit and Chow Thye) and Lee Kong Lam settled in the Klang Valley by way of initial employment by Loke Yew, the most influential Cantonese leader in the Klang Valley. In 1896, Kuala Lumpur became the capital of the Federated Malay States and attracted more Chinese elite from the other states to move in. As a result of the business expansion and the self-development, other Straits-born Cantonese elite like Eu Tong Sen from the Kinta Valley, Perak moved to the Klang Valley in the first decade of the 20th century. This Straits Cantonese migration consisted of the second wave of the Cantonese settlers in the Klang Valley after the first wave in the late 1880s. These two

⁴ Chiew Yoke's appointment to be a member in the Selangor State Council are referred to SSF 693/90. The appoint of Towkay Chiew Yoke to the Selangor State Council

⁵ Chan Sow Lin's skill workers recruitment from Guangzhou and Hong Kong referred from 100 Years Anniversary Souvenir of Chan She Shu Yuen Clan Ancestral Hall (陈氏书院 100 周年纪念特刊), (1996, p.37).

migration waves narrowed the population gap between the Cantonese and the Hakkas. (Table 2)

Table 2
The Demographic Comparison between the Hakka and Cantonese Groups in the Klang Valley (1889-1911)

Dialect Group	1889	1901	1911
Hakka	24575	36897	48316
Cantonese	3806	31461	49912

Sources: Adapted from James C. Jackson, (1892, pp.156-157; 1890, p.91); A. M. Pountney, (eds.), (1921, p.113, 120; Table XL, Table XXXL, Chinese)

As indicated in Table 2, in the first decade of the 20th century, the Hakkas were still the largest Chinese dialect group in the Chinese community. It was only in 1911 that Cantonese became the largest population by 3.3%.

In Table 3, even though the Hakkas had the largest number population, there was a greater imbalance in the gender ratio compared to the Cantonese population in the Klang Valley. This was due to large Cantonese movements into the Klang Valley from the 1890s to 1910s. For the Hakkas, on the other hand, the growth of its population was comparatively slower than the Cantonese.

The Cantonese community started to move to the Klang Valley region on a large scale from the 1890s to 1910s. Table 3 indicates the ratio of female to male in 1901 was 1: 10 for the Hakkas, while for the Cantonese it was 1:1.5. The difference can be attributed to the fact that the Hakkas did not encourage migration of women into Malaya until 1906, while the increase of Cantonese in population was due primarily to their existing bigger proportion of females compared to the Hakkas. This more substantial portion of females was also due to the encouragement of female migration from the Guangzhou Prefecture. For instance, Loke Yew's labour broking agent in Guangzhou, which was managed by his adoptive son Loke Hon Chow, provided the opportunities for the Cantonese females to reunite with their husbands who settled in the Klang Valley, especially in Kuala Lumpur.⁶ Chan Wing later became the Cantonese business tycoon in the region. His first wife who was left behind in San Wui district of the Guangzhou Prefecture had been encouraged to

⁶ The information of Loke Yew and Loke Hon Chows' business in Guangzhou are based on the oral history records of Li Wen (李文), Qiu Qing Yong (丘庆镛) (1981). *The Oral Historical Record of Nanyang Chinese Wong Loke Yew(我所知道的南洋华侨黄陆佑)*, Guangzhou: Guangdong Oral Historical Source Centre (广东省档案馆口述历史中心).

reunite with him when he was a poor migrant in 1900 through Loke Yew's Tong Hing Long Labour broking agent in Guangzhou (Chan, 1999, p.16).

Conclusively, the Cantonese were in a more favourable situation to increase their portion of the population over the Hakkas. (Table 3).

Table 3
The Demographic Comparison and Gender Contrast between the Hakkas and the Cantonese in the Klang Valley in 1901

	Male	Female	Total	% of the overall Chinese population
Hakka	33576	3321	36897	34
Cantonese	18669	12972	31461	29

Source: Pountney, A. M. (eds). (1921, Table XL, Chinese, p.113)

A decade later, the Cantonese population exceeded the Hakkas, and they became the largest dialect group within the Klang Valley Chinese community (Table 4).

Table 4
The Demographic Comparison and Gender Contrast between the Hakkas and the Cantonese in the Klang Valley in 1911

	Male	Female	Total	Decade Increase Rate
Cantonese	28892	21020	49912	58.6%
Hakka	37554	10762	48316	31%

Source: Pountney, A. M. (eds). (1921, Table XXXL, Chinese, p.120)

This growth of the Cantonese dominance in the Klang Valley was apparent up to 1930 when the government intervention in the restriction of external migration came into effect with the *Alien Ordinance 1930*.

From the 1890s to the 1910s, besides dominance in demographic, the Cantonese surpassed the Hakkas in many economic areas. In the 1890s, the Cantonese towkay, Loke Yew, gradually seized and eroded the business territories of the Hakkas, especially in the opium, gambling and revenue farms, pawnbroking, tin mining and brothel industries. In the same industries, Loke Yew obtained more than twice the amount of profit compared to the Hakka leader Yap Kwan Seng in 1896. According to Chin and Liew, Loke Yew was the wealthiest Chinese tycoon in the Klang Valley from 1895 to 1917. (Chin,1997, p.82; Liew,2018, pp.94-95) Profits between Loke and Yap in the different industries, are presented in Table 5.

Table 5
*Business Revenues and Profits between Loke Yew and Yap Kwan Seng (1896)*⁷

	Loke Yew	Yap Kwan Seng
Opium Farming	\$59,500	\$17,000
Revenue Farming	\$56,470	\$22,100
Gambling Farming	\$42,470	\$16,600
Brothels	\$5,500	\$3,800
Tin mining	\$61,700	\$42,300
Pawn broking	\$60,500	\$22,900
Total	\$286,140	\$124,700

Source: Loke Yew's private letters, N.A.S. Accession No: N.A.B. 1569-0080-0862-,0223; N.A.B. 1855-0080-0863-0064.

Loke Yew's success as a businessman was due to his innovative moves. He was the first Chinese business headman in the Klang Valley to carry out cross-ethnic business cooperation. He worked with the Indian business elite K. Thamboosamy Pillai to develop the tin mine in Serendah in 1893.⁸ He was also the first Chinese businessman to employ a British manager in 1897 (Ng Lai Hoe, 1992, pp.7-8). Loke Yew's pioneering contributions to the economic sector prompted his leading Cantonese business group to venture into the other industries and sectors in the later years.

During the last few years of the 19th Century, Loke Yew became the de facto leader of the Cantonese community in the Klang Valley. He employed both the Cantonese newcomers from mainland China like Chan Wing and Cheong Yoke Choy and the Straits-born Cantonese like Loke Chow Kit and Lee Kong Lam. To some extent, Loke Yew trained several Cantonese business elites who served as his staff and managers before they founded their businesses. Besides being his employees, the other Cantonese towkays who settled in Selangor like Chan Sow Lin, and even Eu Tong Sen in Perak and Tong Yen in Negeri Sembilan, were also managing Loke Yew's subsidiaries or became proxies for him in the political arena. In this social context, the Cantonese community formed a pyramid hierarchy in which Loke Yew played the role as the leader with other business elites under his wings. This hierarchical leadership structure contributed to the continual chain of command in the Cantonese community and to a great extent prevented a gap in leadership succession which was experienced by the Hakka group from 1902 to 1933, after the death of Yap Kwan Seng.

⁷ SSF 549/96, Loke Yew private letters, NAS Accession No: NAB 1569-0080-0862-0223 Loke Yew Tong Hing Long Enterprise; NAB 1855-0080-0863-0064, Letter from Loke Yew to Loke Han Chow.

⁸ SSF 1018/93 The 20 acres of land application in Serendah from Rawang Electric Company, Loke Yew & Thamboosamy Pillay.

The Hakkas started to have the idea to assume themselves as a united sub-ethnic group since the beginning of the 20th century. (Shih, 2013, pp.1-56). Moreover, the idea of Hakka unity originated from the Hakka group in Taiwan during the 1910s. The awareness spread to the British Malaya several years later. Therefore, the Hakka Unity in the Klang Valley was disrupted by several Hakka Sub-dialect associations from the late 19th century to the early 20th century. The Cantonese, on the other hand, stayed united under one association throughout its formation in 1887. Table 6 indicates the number of sub-dialect associations formed under the Hakkas.

In 1929, the Nanyang Khek Community Guild (南洋客属总会) was set up in Singapore.⁹ This guild was the first Federation of all Hakka associations in Southeast Asia. Many Hakka associations in Malaya, Borneo, Dutch East Indies, Siam and the Philippines became the members of the NKCG. In 1991, the Malaysian Hakka groups organized themselves into a united body called The Federation of Hakka Associations of Malaysia.¹⁰ Before 1929, the organization of sub-dialect groups of the Hakka community was dispersed. Thus, there was no unity in voicing out their concerns, neither the power of united voice to influence decisions made by the colonial government.

Table 6

*Dialectal Associations within the Hakka and Cantonese communities in the Klang Valley before 1930.*¹¹

Dialect	Sub Dialect Association (Year of Establishment)
Hakka	Selangor Fui Chiu Association (1864)
	Selangor Cha Yong Association (1878)
	Selangor Chih Xi Association (1890)
	Selangor Ka Yin Association (1898)
	Selangor Tong On Association (1902)
	Selangor Ho Po Association (1917)
Cantonese	Selangor Kwong Siew Association (1887)

On the other hand, the socio organizational structure of the Cantonese community in the Klang Valley was more centralized through a unitary dialect association – the Selangor Kwongsiew Association founded in 1887. Cantonese sub-dialect district organizations like the Selangor Shun Tuck Association (1949), Selangor Koh Yew

⁹ Referred the information of the Nanyang Khek Community Guild (南洋客属总会) to its website at <http://nykcg.sg/>

¹⁰ The establishment of the Federation of Hakka Association of Malaysia (马来西亚客家会馆联合会) are based on the Introduction in *The 20th Anniversary Gazette of the Federation of Hakka Association of Malaysia*, (马来西亚客家会馆联合会成立 20 周年纪念特刊) (2011, p.2).

¹¹ Founding Years of the Dialect Associations which listed in Table 2 referred to Wu Hua's *The History of Chinese Association in Malaysia* (马来西亚华族会馆史略) (1979, pp.39-132).

Association (1952) and Selangor Ko Chow Association (1956) were founded only after the Second World War, which is beyond the scope of this study. The unity of sub-dialects in the Cantonese community within one association for more than 60 years since its formation stabilized both Cantonese businesses and workforce, which seemed to have safeguarded Cantonese dominance in the Chinese economic domain in the Klang Valley for several decades (1900-1930).

The leadership style of Hakka *Kapitan Cina* Yap Kwan Seng also contributed to the rise of Cantonese dominance in the socio-economic lives of the Chinese community. In the 1890s, Yap delegated some of the management functions of *Kapitan Cina* like the arbitration of the internal disputes within the Chinese community to the Selangor Kwong Siew Association (Liew, 2012, p.25). Besides, in the early 20th century, the Selangor Kwong Siew Association started to participate in the management of the Selangor Kwong Tung Cemetery which was founded initially by the Hakka community under Yap Kwan Seng.

At the same time, the Cantonese towkays like Cheong Yoke Choy and Liew Weng Chee founded a Chinese private free school, and a worship centre - the Kuanti Temple and located its management under the Kwong Siew Association. Facilities of the school and worship centre including services for judicial cases and funerals were opened to other dialects.¹²

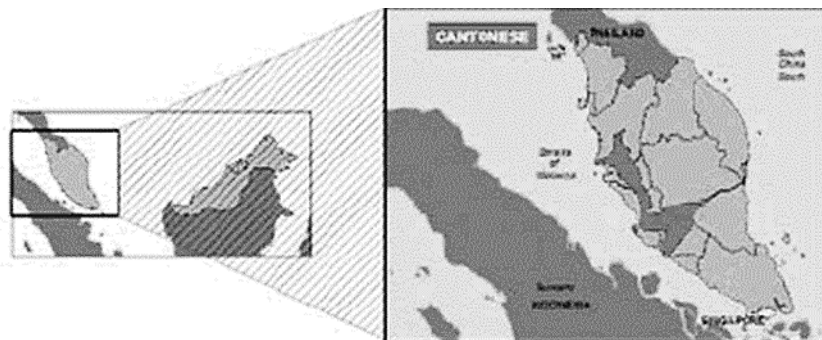
One other crucial Cantonese dialect organization which contributed to the growth of the Cantonese community is the Chan She Shu Yuen Clan Ancestral Hall giving out community services on education, worship and encouraging consanguinity among its members. Besides it being a place of deity and ancestral worship, it also served as the meeting place for the Cantonese towkays before the establishment of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce.

Both the Selangor Kwong Siew Association and the Chan She Shu Yuen Clan Ancestral Hall belonged to the type of dialect organizations which were typical social organizations within the Cantonese community in the first three decades of the 20th century.

¹² The judicial function of the Selangor Kwong Siew Association was recorded in their association's Anniversary Souvenir Magazines. For instance, The 70th Years Souvenir Magazines of the Selangor Kwong Siew Association (雪兰莪广肇会馆 70 周年纪念特刊) (1957, p.42).

3.1 The Cantonese role in the British and the Mainland Chinese Aspects (1900-1910s)

Cantonese business power expanded from the Klang Valley into some areas of the other Federated Malay States in the 1910s (Figure 1).



Source: The 70th Anniversary Gazette of the Federation of Malaysian Kwong Tung Associations (1957, p.35.)

Figure 1: The Cantonese Distribution in the Malay Peninsula (1915)

The abolishment of the *Kapitan Cina* system by the British in 1902, opened up doors for the Cantonese leaders to participate in the administrative and the legislative organizations of the State. It appeared as one of the means for the Cantonese to stabilize their leadership among the local Chinese community (1900-1910s). From 1890 to 1940, ten Cantonese elites served as Chinese representatives in four British administrative and legislative organizations related to Chinese affairs (Table 7).

Table 7
 Cantonese Elite in the British Administrative and Legislative Organizations¹³

Administrative/ Legislative Body	Cantonese Elite
Selangor State Council	Chiew Yeok, Chan Sow Lin, Loke Yew, Lee Kong Lam, Cheong Yoke Choy, Loke Chow Kit
Chinese Advisory Board	Chan Sow Lin, Cheong Yoke Choy, Chan Wing, H.S. Lee, San Ah Wing
Kuala Lumpur Sanitary Board	Loke Yew, Chan Sow Lin, Loke Chow Kit, Lee Kong Lam, Alan Loke, H.S. Lee
F.M.S. Council	Eu Tong Sen, Lee Kong Lam, Loke Chow Kit

¹³ Members in the above organizations in Table 7 are counted from Ahmad K.A.M.S, (2001, p.31, p.102) ; SSF 549/92 Loke Yew's appointment in the Selangor State Council; SSF 1005/ 1903 The Proclaim of the Chinese Advisory Board.

Table 7 indicates that 6 Cantonese headmen had been deputed in Selangor State Council (along with the Malay Sultan as the ‘State’s executive body of the government). Chinese Advisory Board was the prime official body of indirect colonial rule over the Chinese in the British administration before the Second World War which recruited five Cantonese towkays. Kuala Lumpur Sanitary Board functioned as the city administrative centre in Kuala Lumpur in the early 20th century and appointed 6 Cantonese headmen. F.M.S. Council was the highest legislative body in the Federated Malay State, and only three Straits-born Cantonese were nominated in this council through the approval from the British High Commissioner in Malaya.

In the early 20th century, pro-British orientation could be seen in the financial support according to the British government by the Cantonese business community in donations to the First World War. (Table 8). This obligation to support the British government was indicative of a shift in loyalty from mainland China to the local colonial government, as the British in its homeland was fighting a war against the Germans.

Table 8

The Cantonese Towkay Donation to the British During the First World War

Towkay (Year of Donation)	Donation Amount
Loke Yew (1914)	\$5,600
Eu Tong Sen (1914)	\$5,000
Chan Wing (1915)	\$4,500
Loke Chow Kit (1915)	\$3,500

Source: British War Archives. The Great Britain War Committee (eds), (1918, (Vol .6) p.7, (Vol .7) p.42, 65).

It is noteworthy that all of them applied for British citizenships from 1897 to 1915 and visited Great Britain for long periods, and subsequently became British subjects. Both the F.M.S government and the government in mainland China allowed dual citizenship and helped to protect their economic interests during the first half of the 20th Century (Voon, 2007, pp.140-146). Therefore, their naturalization to the British was based on both practical business benefits (cases in point of Loke Yew and Chan Wing) and the shift of their loyalty (cases in point of Eu Tong Sen and Loke Chow Kit). Working with the colonials and acquiring power from them had caused the Chinese Towkays to abandon their loyalty to the motherland China. It is also noteworthy that the status was granted irrespective of educational background. Loke Yew did not have formal education whereas Eu Tong Sen received Chinese language education in

mainland China and English language education in Penang. Chan Wing was Chinese educated, while Loke Chow Kit was English educated.¹⁴ Even though there were some practical benefits for these Cantonese business elites if they became the British Subject, these Cantonese headmen successfully assimilated themselves in the Klang Valley community and thereby consolidated the Cantonese leadership within the Chinese community in the region.

On the other hand, the other Cantonese elites who came from the backgrounds of the petit bourgeoisie as well as labourer were still loyal to China and actively participated locally in the political movements of the 1911 Revolution in China. They also led the 1911 revolutionary movements in the Klang Valley. Active donors for the 1911 movements (Table 9) were mainly from a group of small businessmen.

Table 9
The Cantonese Donation to the 1911 Revolutionary Movement (\$Straits Dollars)

Donation	Loke Chow Thye	Lee Kwai Lim	Cheong Yoke Choy	Tung Yen	Chan Chin Mooi
1906	1860	1330	729	1420	353
1911 uprising	1560	960	333	15600	1551

Sources: Huang Ching Wan (黄警顽) (1933, pp.31-32); Tung Yen (邓泽如) (1968, pp.53-55); Yen (1976, pp.311-312); Zou Lu (邹鲁) (1921, pp.12-13).

Local support for the revolution was seen in the formation of the branches of Tung Mung Hui (precursor of Kuomintang party) led by Chan Chin Mooi with members as listed in Table 10.

Tables 9 and 10 showed non-involvement of Cantonese business tycoons in these Sino political movements, except for Chan Wing (Tables 8 and 10) who participated in both pro-British support and the Sino political movement. Businessmen

Table 10
The Representative Cantonese members in Tung Mung Hui Selangor Branch

Name	Joining Year
Chan Chin Mooi	1906
Too Nam	1906
Cheong Yoke Choy	1907
Loke Chow Thye	1907
Lee Kwai Lim	1908
Chan Wing	1908
San Peng	1908

Source: Yen (1976, pp.311-312).

¹⁴ These Cantonese leaders' educational background are based on the information in following books: Sharp, I. (2009, p.19), *Path of the Righteous Crane: The Life and Legacy of Eu Tong Sen*; Chan, K.N. *From Poor Migrant to Millionaire: Chan Wing*, (1998, p.19); Liew, K. B. *Loke Yew (陆佑)*, (2018, p.161).

like Chan Wing, who supported both pro-British and Sino movements were undecided on their loyalties and stayed neutral to ensure their gain in future opportunities.

Overall, comparative studies between the Cantonese community's participation in the 1911 Revolutionary Movement and the pro-British events during the First World War showed that the Cantonese community in the Klang Valley could be divided into three groups. Group A consists of the pro-British group, which is inclusive of mainly Straits-born Cantonese and Cantonese business tycoons. They also obtained British citizenship. Cantonese headmen like Loke Chow Kit, Eu Tong Sen and Loke Yew belonged to this group. Group B consists of the opportunists, who had dual loyalty and exhibited active participation in both British colonial and mainland Chinese events. Members of this group included the Cantonese towkays like Chan Sow Lin and Chan Wing. Group C consists of Sino-loyalists, who were loyal to China and actively adhered to activism oriented towards mainland China. Members of this group included Chan Chin Mooi and Cheong Yoke Choy (Wang, 1984, pp.163-164).

Apart from the Cantonese socio-political elements, the trans-regional business network was also the factor which contributed to the growth of the Cantonese power within the Klang Valley. The Cantonese towkay Loke Yew, Eu Tong Sen, Chan Wing, Cheong Yoke Choy and Lee Kwai Lim built up their business ties between the Klang Valley and the other British settlements, especially Burma and Hong Kong. Loke Yew's Tong Hing Long Enterprise expanded to Hong Kong in 1905. (Tai, 2013, p.80.) Eu Tong Sen's mining capital in Malaya invested in the new banks in Singapore and Hong Kong in the 1910s (Sharp, 2009, pp.93-94). Lee Kwai Lim and Cheong Yoke Choy's remittance business had developed economic ties between Kuala Lumpur and Hong Kong in the 1920s. ¹⁵Chan Wing's rice trading business had also crossed British Burma and the Malay Peninsula in the 1920s (Chan, 1999, p.33). These transregional businesses strengthened Cantonese economic merits. The Cantonese leadership in the Chinese community of the Klang Valley persisted until 1930.

¹⁵ Lee Kwai Lim's Chop Kam Lon Tai and his business are according to Tan Miao Ing. Chinese Labour Broker in Malaya: Lee Kwai Lim and his Kam Lun Tai Company, *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, (2017. pp.59-60.); Cheong Yoke Choy's information sourced from *The 80th Anniversary Magazines of the Selangor Kwongtung Association* (雪隆广东会馆 80 周年纪念特刊), (2019, pp.236-237).

4.0 The Growth to Maturity of the Cantonese Community (1930-1941)

From the 1910s to 1920s, because of the political instability in China, some of the Cantonese migrants from the gentry class like Lee Kwai Lim and his eldest son Lee Hau Shik settled in the Klang Valley region. This group of Cantonese had strong Chinese Kuomintang official backgrounds and gradually became the Chinese community leader locally in the 1930s. Lee Hau Shik, who had settled in the Klang Valley since 1924, became the leader of the Cantonese community based on his father's social inheritance and his reputation.

Overall, despite the differences in the Cantonese leaders' backgrounds, they had managed to extend their leadership which was based on specific dialect groups to the provincial aspect. In other words, their concept of leadership had reached its maturity phase. In 1931, Lee Hau Shik suggested that there was a need for the Chinese, who came from different districts in Kwang Tung Province or had their roots in the counties of Kwang Tung Province, China to unite and a provincial association for them would be provided.¹⁶ According to Lee Hau Shik, the five major dialect groups in the Klang Valley, except the Hokkiens¹⁷, were members of that provincial associations. However, Lee's suggestion did not receive many responses from the other dialect associations. Eight years later, when their ancestral hometowns suffered the Sino-Japanese war, Lee's provincial association effort became relevant in 1939.¹⁸

The Cantonese community maintained its dominant status among the Chinese community until the Great Depression in the 1930s. The economic recession significantly reduced the demand for imported labourers. James Lornie, the Resident of Selangor, implemented the Alien Ordinance to ban external male migrants from mainland China into the Selangor state. This move was concurrent with the implementation of the similar ordinance by Sir Cecil Clementi in Singapore.¹⁹

¹⁶ Academia Historica (国史馆), Accession No: 001-067140-00031-024. 国民政府军事委员会委员长蒋中正为吉隆坡华侨陈振永捐献飞机一事授予金质奖章[Commendation of a Gold Medal to Chan Wing from Chiang Kai Shek for his Air-craft donation to the Chinese Air Force].

¹⁷ Academia Historica (国史馆), Accession No: 001-067140-00031-016. 国民政府文官处致函李孝式解释陈嘉庚的报告真相 [Telegraph to mediate the disputes between Tan Kah Kee and H.S. Lee by Kuomintang Overseas Chinese Ministry].

¹⁸ Academia Historica (国史馆), Accession No: 001-067140-00031-045. 雪兰莪华侨筹赈祖国难民委员会主席李孝式致函国民政府主席林森 [Telegraph from Lee Hau Shik to Lin Sen, the President of the Kuomintang Government].

¹⁹ The *Alien Ordinance* which banned the Chinese male migrants can be referred to The National Archives, Kew Garden: File No: CO 273/248/1930, Immigration Restriction Ordinance.

Table 11

Cantonese and Hokkien population in the Klang Valley before and after the 1930 Aliens Ordinance

Year	Chinese Population	Hokkien Population	Proportion	Cantonese Population	Proportion
1929	94426	24725	26.18%	36629	35.62%
1934	115375	37325	32.35%	38073	33.54%
Increase	20949	12600	6.17%	1444	-2.08%

Source: Tufo (1949, p.25).

Table 11 indicates an increase of the overall Chinese population in the Klang Valley to 18.15% from 94,426 in 1929 to 115,375 in 1934 after the implementation of Alien Ordinance in 1930. The increase was due to the influx of Hokkiens into the region, while the proportion of Cantonese dropped even though there was a slight increase in the actual number of the Cantonese in those areas.

The ban on mass migration from China by the colonial government affected the Cantonese proportion of the Chinese population as they depended heavily on labour from China. The Mass Cantonese migrations in the Klang Valley in the 1910s-1920s, especially in the towns of Kepong and Rawang, were mainly depended on Cantonese towkay Lee Kwai Lim's labour-broking business through his agent- Chop Kum Lun Tai. This business was suspended in 1930 (Tan, 2017, pp.55-69) when the Labor Migration Enactment was implemented by the British Governor/Resident in the Straits Settlement and the F.M.S. to ban the entry of the male newcomers under the Great Depression.²⁰

The Hokkiens, on the other hand, had settled in the Malay Peninsula since the 16th century and thus had a more significant localized population. They were not as severely affected by the *Aliens Ordinance 1930* as compared to the Cantonese. They could move their business contacts and expertise from the different parts of the Malay Peninsula to the Klang Valley without waiting for labour from mainland China. Another factor that tipped the balance of the dialect groups in the Klang Valley was that the Hokkien was less inhibitive and more open in their business networks. (Song, 2018, pp.93-96) They were able to assimilate into the existing community faster vis-a-vis the Cantonese businessmen. This move also contributed to the shift of the Hokkien economic activities

²⁰ The ban of male migrants into the F.M.S. was recorded on *New Yik Khuan Pao* (新益群報) 28 February 1930.

from the west coast to Kuala Lumpur. The Hokkien community leaders Tan Yit Chen and Ng Tiong Kiat moved to Kuala Lumpur from Klang in 1915 and 1918 respectively.

However, business operations between the Hokkiens and the Cantonese were slightly different in methodologies. The Cantonese economic power drew on its trans-regional business network, while the Hokkien economic growth built on their experience and the capital from the other states in Malaya (Tai, 2013, pp.90-121). For instance, the Hokkien businessman's business acumen was of an all-round approach. At the same time, the Cantonese confined their businesses to their dialect group and sought political support from the colonial government. The difference in strategy by the Hokkiens may have pitted well against the economic strength of the Cantonese businessman. The Hokkien business group was involved in the real estate contract business, with the Hokkien leader Ang Chin Chong as the representative; Ngan Wai Hon and Tan Yit Chen were the two active businessmen in rubber trading industry.²¹ Ng Tiong Kiat, Ang Kee Tho were the active traders in the commercial activities between the Klang Valley and mainland China. Moreover, the Hokkien towkays in the Klang Valley were inseparable from the Singapore Hokkien leaders like Tan Kah Kee. Ng Tiong Kiat was the social proxy of Tan Kah Kee in the Klang Valley region (Leong, 1976, p.537).

In the 1930s, as China faced an external threat from the Japanese invasion, the Sino-oriented nationalism and patriotism movements resurged in the Klang Valley. These movements resulted in some of the Chinese settlers' loyalty in the shift of patriotism from British Malaya back to China. National identity is the perception of a country's citizens about which country it belongs to and the composition of the country, such as politics, culture, ethnic groups, and other factors. It is the sublimation of ethnic identity and cultural identity. Chinese local identity in the Malay Peninsula referred to the sense of belonging of the Chinese dialect groups to their new adoptive homeland (Chong, 2009, pp.91-95). In the 1930s, the sense of loyalty among the Chinese to the Motherland China gradually shifted to the place where they settled: they had put down their roots in the Klang Valley region for many decades despite holding mainland Chinese citizenship. However, the particular political elements such as the Sino-Japanese conflicts had sublimated their ethnic perception as Chinese subjects. Consequently, many shifted their loyalties back to China.

²¹ Hokkien businessmen's businesses in real estate development and rubber trading are according to the records in The 110th Anniversary Souvenir Magazine of Selangor Hokkien Association. (雪隆福建会馆 110 周年特刊), (1995, pp.13-19).

To some extent, this shift in loyalty did not produce effective results in the pro-China movements. This was partly due to a lack of united and organized voice among different Chinese dialect groups in providing effective and continuous support to the Kuomintang government. The Kuomintang government played the role as a mediator to solve the contractions in the South Sea Chinese Relief Fund Committee between the Cantonese headman Lee Hau Shik and the Hokkien leader Tan Kah Kee.²² The Kuomintang Selangor Branches were organized in 1930 by 4 Hokkein leaders: Ngan Wai Hon, Lee Kiat Beng, Tan Yit Chen and Ang Chin Chong. The other two organizers were Chan Chin Mooi from the Cantonese group and Teh Tiu Peng from the Hailam group.²³ For this purpose, ethnic integration then became a prominent issue to be dealt within the Chinese community in the Klang Valley. For the Cantonese, who felt that they had superior qualities to lead the Chinese, they were not acceptable to the other dialects. On the other hand, the Hokkiens who appeared to have equally treated the different dialect groups were perceived as more humble and suitable to represent the Chinese community. In 1939, the Selangor Kwangtung Association which combined the Cantonese, Hakka, Teo Chew, Hailam dialect groups, still used the Cantonese dialect as the working languages²⁴. The members in the Selangor Hokkien Association, however, used Mandarin instead of their dialect as the public language in 1930.²⁵

Thus, a Hokkien known as Ang Keh Tho was chosen over the Cantonese Cheong Yoke Choy to head the Selangor Chinese Assembly Hall (the largest and most representative Chinese ethnic organization in the Klang Valley) in 1940.²⁶ During this period, the Selangor Chinese Relief Fund Committee and South Seas Federation of China Relief Funds Association, two major anti- Japanese organizations were founded. Leaders in these two organizations were mostly Hokkiens (Leong, 1976, pp.112-119). The establishment of these two organizations in the Klang Valley resulted in the appointment of Mr Tan Kah Kee, a legendary Hokkien community leader in Singapore as well as efforts which were mainly contributed by the Selangor Hokkien Association.

²² Academia Historica (国史馆), Accession No. 001-067140-00031-016. Telegraph to mediate the disputes between Tan Kah Kee and H.S. Lee by Kuomintang Overseas Chinese Ministry (国民政府文官处致函李孝式解释陈嘉庚的报告真相).

²³ The name list of the Kuomintang Members referred from CO 2373/72010A/1930, Activities of Kuomintang In Malaya. Their dialect attributions are counted by author.

²⁴ Source of working language in the Selangor Kwongtung Association from 1939-1950 are according to *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 16 July, 1939; HSL 102/9, Private Letter to Deputy Registrar from H.S. Lee on 28th March, 1940.

²⁵ According to The Meeting Records of the Selangor Hokkien Association (雪兰莪福建会馆会议簿), (1934-1937, pp.5-6.).

²⁶ Selangor Chinese Relief Fund Committee meeting were recorded in *Nan Yang Siang Pau*, 5 July, 1940.

(Song, 2019, pp.74-77)²⁷ The meeting records of the Selangor Hokkien Association provided an account of the meeting in August which stated that the Selangor Hokkiens appealed for the establishment of a cross-dialect organization to raise funds for Chinese Anti-Japanese military movements.²⁸ Therefore, the leaders in the Selangor Hokkien Association like Ang Kee Tho, Ang Chin Chong and Ng Tiong Kiat also participated in these two Sino-orientated patriotic organizations.²⁹ With the rise of the Hokkien socio-economic power, the Hokkiens had challenged the Cantonese leadership in the Klang Valley . Simultaneously, the cross-dialect Chinese ethnic integration was progressively achieved based on national identity.

5.0 Conclusion

The Cantonese community in the Klang Valley consisted of poor migrants from mainland China, the gentry migrants and the Straits-born Cantonese. The development of the Cantonese community can be divided into three phases - the first drove, the second growth phase, and the maturity phase.

In the first drove (1860-1887) of the dialect group development, the Cantonese newcomers temporarily left their dialect identity to be under the influential Hakka leaders. In the second growth phase (1887-1930), the Cantonese community was united under a dialect association with a leadership-hierarchy. The hierarchical leadership enabled the Cantonese community to grow mature and consolidate on the grounds of businesses for the benefit of all members. This solidarity and collaboration in business enabled the Cantonese to undergo rapid economic progress which surpassed the economic power of the Hakkas. As elaborated, the different social levels within the Cantonese society had varying loyalties in the 1910s. The Cantonese elite concentrated on gaining local influence in the governance of their economies by joining or having access to agencies of the colonial government.

Throughout the 1930s, the Cantonese group was led by young elites from the gentry class like Lee Hau Shik and San Ah Wing. They organized more associations or

²⁷ The relationship and connection between Tan Kah Kee and the Selangor Hokkien Association cited from Song Yan Peng, (2019, pp.74-77), *The History Study of Fujian Province Community in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Birthplace, Organization and Identity*, (马来西亚吉隆坡福建社群史研究: 籍贯、组织和认同); The Meeting Records of the Selangor Hokkien Association(雪兰莪福建会馆会议簿), (1937-1941, pp.137-138, pp.151-152).

²⁸ According to The Meeting Records of the Selangor Hokkien Association (雪兰莪福建会馆会议簿) (1937-1941, pp.78-80).

²⁹ Ang Kee Tho, Ang Chin Chona and Ng Tiong Keats' activities in the Selangor Chinese Relief Fund Committee are according to *Nanyang Siang Pau*, 11 October, 1938.

groupings for more specialized functions, which also facilitated the expansion of their businesses to national and international levels. These dual attributes of the Cantonese business community resulted in having a strong influence on the overall Chinese community as well as having a more influential say in government affairs.

Throughout the development of the Cantonese community in the Klang Valley, the qualities which seem to stand out among the Cantonese are their gift in establishing useful and reliable business networks and their leadership hierarchy that was constructed during Loke Yew's era. Besides, they also saw the need to influence government policies for the benefits of their businesses either through their contacts with the governing bodies or by being members of influential government committees. However, when the Hokkein group emerged more influential in the Klang Valley region's Chinese community, accompanied by the impact of the Sino-oriented nationalism, the Cantonese group lost their absolute authority while remaining as one of the largest Chinese dialect groups in the Klang Valley.

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