

# *Rigidity of System Boundary among Major Chinese Dialect Groups in Nineteenth-Century Singapore: A Study of Inscription Data*

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## ABSTRACT

The study attempts to delineate the degree of system rigidity of three major dialect groups, namely, the Cantonese, the Hakkas and the Hokkiens. The principal source of data is derived from inscriptions collected by Chen and Tan (1972). The findings reveal that at the individual level the system boundary of the Hokkiens was more rigid than that of the Cantonese and the Hakkas. This confirms earlier observations made at the organizational level.

Earlier observations dictate that after 1854 the Cantonese and the Hakkas were, at the organizational level, not on good terms. This was, however, not the case at the individual level. We also found that the system boundary of religious organizations, i.e., temples and burial ground bodies, was least rigid.

## Introduction

THE Chinese immigrants in Southeast Asia have always been thought of as a fragmented community by virtue of their prolific dialects and the associated social characteristics. In each settlement they mutually segregated themselves more than they were estranged by the local society. This is especially the case in the early Straits Settlements.

There have been numerous inspiring and painstaking studies on the structure of the early Chinese immigrant community, but only a few of these are based on a systematic analysis of inscription data.<sup>1</sup> The works

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Ch'en and Chan (1971), Seiji Imahore (1972), Jao (1969), Hibino Takeo (1969) and Tan (Chen and Tan, 1972).

by Tan Yoke Seong (Chen and Tan, 1972:23-9)<sup>2</sup> and by Seiji Imahore (1972) on the Chinese in early Singapore and the Chinese in Malaya respectively, are two of these few. In his study, Tan (1972) observed that the Chinese organized themselves into dialect/locality groups for the purpose of monopolizing certain categories of occupation. Among those dialect groups, the Hokkiens were the most influential people in the Singapore Chinese community, with an active interest in commerce. The Cantonese who were mainly artisans, formed the second power group, and the third in order were the Hakkas who took up farming as their principal profession.<sup>3</sup>

Tan (1972) further observed, at the organizational level, that not all the dialect groups were homogeneous. Within each of these three major powerful dialect groups, there were centrifugal forces. Of the Hokkien group, the people from Chang-chou formed an exclusive locality group. They not only excluded people from other provinces, but even those from the same province, e.g., the people from Hsing-hua, Fu-chou, Fu-ch'ing and Ch'ang-tai districts. Besides this Chang-Ch'uan group who claimed to represent the people from Fukien Province, there were in nineteenth-century Singapore two other major and one minor Hokkien power groups which were claimed (Imahore, 1972:130-7; Tan, 1972:111) to have had no relations whatsoever with the Chang-Ch'uan group. Of the three, the most influential group was the one which centred its activities around the Ch'ang-tai Miao (or Hui Kuan). Its leader, Chang Fang-lin, was not only an appointed bureaucrat of the Ch'ing Emperor but also an acting kapitan tacitly recognized by the British. This group was thus instrumental in reinforcing the British control over the local Chinese. This may explain why the Ch'ang-tai group was not related to the Chang-Ch'uan group whose leaders had no connections with any political machinery at all (Imahore, 1972: 135-6).

The second power group was organized around the Chin Lan Miao. This group was said (Tan, 1972) to have been controlled by a secret organization, namely, the Ch'ing Pang, which was not related to the Chang-Ch'uan's Hung-men secret organization. The third group was the Chin-men people's Fou Chi Miao. The temple (or miao) was

<sup>2</sup> Hereafter it will be referred to as Tan (1972), except where references to inscriptions are made.

<sup>3</sup> In fact, quite a number of them were *kung-sheng* and *sheng-yuan*, who were among the most respected of the four status hierarchies of the commoners in traditional China. The other three in a descending order are the farmers, the artisan workers and the merchants (Ho, 1962: 17-20).

established (1876) at a time when Chin-men was administratively not a district of Fukien Province.

Although in nineteenth-century Singapore there was more than one power centre in the Hokkien community, the relationship among them appeared to be static. Comparatively, the Cantonese and the Hakka groups appeared to be more dynamic in their social relationships. Among the Cantonese and the Hakkas, there were several combined groups. Apart from the more exclusive Cantonese group, e.g., Ning Yang Hui Kuan, and the Hakka group, e.g., Ying Ho Kuan, there were several other groups constituted by a mixture of Cantonese and Hakkas from different districts and provinces. For instance, the Feng-Yung-Ta group whose members spoke the Hakka dialect, comprised people from different provinces and prefectures, including the Feng-shun (of Kwangtung's Ch'ao-chou), Yung-ting (of Fukien's T'ing-chou or Ch'ang-ting), and Ta-p'u (Kwangtung). There was an even more heterogeneous group. It was composed of several administrative units and whose members spoke different dialects. The seven units refer to Feng-shun, Yung-ting, Ta-p'u, Kuang-chou (or Canton), Hui-chou, Chao-ch'ing and Chia-ying.

The above-mentioned observation pertains to groups at the organizational level. It strongly suggests that the system boundary is more rigid among some dialect groups than in others. This is perhaps too simplified a way of describing the degree of system rigidity, for rigidity of system boundary contains several components. Below we chart out the various major components of the concept:

	Membership/ Organizational (1)	Membership/ Individual (2)	Contribution/ Organizational (3)	Contribution/ Individual (4)
(I) Most flexible	+	+	+	+
(II) Less flexible	—	+	+	+
(III) Moderately flexible	—	—	+	+
(IV) Less rigid	—	—	—	+
(V) Most rigid	—	—	—	—

Chart 1. Degree of Rigidity of System Boundary in an Unidimensional Scale.

According to Chart 1, the system boundary of an organization is considered most flexible if the organization accepts another organization as a member; to be most rigid if the organization refuses to accept even contributions from an individual member of another organization, or

disallows its individual members to contribute to another organization. The chart provides an unidimensional scale, in the fashion of Guttman scalogram. That means, an organization which accepts another *organization as its member* (Row I, Column 1, or I:1), would also accept *as a member any individual* of this other organization (I:2), *contributions* from this other organization (I:3), and also contributions from individual members of this other organization (I:4). On the contrary, however, if an organization refuses to accept even contributions from an individual member of another organization, it would also not accept situations described under I:3, I:2 and I:1.

Each of the Chart's rows indicated by Roman numerals can in fact be further extended and differentiated. For instance, the most rigid category (Row V), like the other four categories (Rows IV, III, II and I) can itself be divided into comparative subcategories: more or less rigid, according to internal variations of related variables. The present study will mainly focus on this aspect of the rigidity of system boundary.

However, the classification in the Chart is based on the assumption that the dialect origin of each of the individuals is known. But in fact our inscription data do not permit such an assumption: while some of those donors' dialect origins can be established, many are not. Because of this limitation, we alternatively replace system rigidity with a more relaxed concept: cross-participation. This alternative concept may be defined as involvements of a person in the form of contributions, financial or otherwise, in two organizations each of which was of a different dialect/locality origin. As such, a cross-participant is one whose dialect origin is unknown. But it should be valid to assume that a cross-participant is one who belonged to only one of the recipient organizations and not the non-recipient organizations.

The concept of cross-participation has two components and they are the number of cross-appearing names, and the relative size of donations which in turn will be measured by the standard deviation of the difference between two donations and the numbers of major and minor donations. This aspect of investigation constitutes the core of the present study. However, we will also look into certain important correlates of system rigidity which are permitted by the set of data. These correlates are the temporal factor in cross-participation and system rigidity among the sub-organizations such as temples, public cemeteries and dialect associations. All these, the proper and the correlates, may be better understood in question form as follows:

- (1) Which were the dialect locality groups that were very rigid in

their system boundaries? Were their system boundaries so very rigid that they rejected even individual members of other dialect groups to take part in their own activities, and/or were so very rigid that they disallowed their own individual members to participate in other dialect groups' activities? From the findings presented by Imahore (1972) and Tan (1972), the Chang-Ch'uan people at the organizational level seem to be such a dialect/locality group.

- (2) At the individual level, in what kind of organized activity was a dialect group's system boundary less rigid than another? These organized activities may revolve around secret societies, clannish shrines, temples, burial ground committees, schools, etc. In fact, Tan (1972) has implied that secret societies had all along been a melting pot of the first degree for the Chinese immigrants of all dialect origins. Second in importance were the public cemetery bodies, followed by the shrines.
- (3) Had the rigidity of system boundary been persistent since the second quarter of the nineteenth century?<sup>4</sup> Alternatively, was rigidity of system boundary time-specific? The temporal factor is particularly significant in specifying system rigidity of such dynamic groups as the Cantonese and the Hakkas. From the inscription text Imahore (1972:142) found that since 1854 when the Fu Te Tz'u (or Ta Po Kung Miao at Telok Ayer) was built, the Cantonese and the Hakkas had not been on good terms at the organizational level.<sup>5</sup> Could this also mean that after 1854, or

<sup>4</sup> The earliest piece of inscription contained in Chen and Tan's (1972) book dates back to 1830, and our study covers only inscriptions erected before the twentieth century.

<sup>5</sup> Imahore's (1972: 142) observation seems a bit too gross. We observed that the Hakkas and the Cantonese had made two attempts to co-operate. One in 1862 and another in the 1884 'autumn'. The following list of dates on the organized activities of the Cantonese and the Hakkas may help to clarify this point. Crucial years are marked with asterisks.

Year	Description of Organizations
1840*	Kuang-tung Yung-ting Public Cemetery (Cantonese and Hakkas)
1846	Ying Ho Kuan (Hakkas)
1848	Ning Yang Hui Kuan (Cantonese)
1854*	Ta Po Kung Miao at Telok Ayer (Renovated by the Kuang-Hui-Chao Cantonese and the Teochius)
1858	Ch'a Yang Hui Kuan (Hakkas)
1861	Fu Te Tz'u at Tanjong Pagar (Renovated by the Hakkas)
1862*	Renovation of Li Chi Bridge at the Public Cemetery (Cantonese and Hakkas, i.e., Kuang-Hui-Chao, Feng-Yung-Ta and Chia-ying)

after the erection of the Fu Te Tz'u, there had been no cases of *individual* cross-participation from members of the two dialect groups? All these questions may be answered through studying the degree of cross-participation in each dialect group's organized activities.

### Data and Methods

*Source of Data:* Two sets of data are used in the present study. The first set contains 72 name tablets placed on an altar housed in a shrine known as She Kung Miao or Wu Hu Tz'u (Mak, forthcoming). These 72 persons were said to be secret society members (Tan, 1972:12-13), and their status is established by the fact that in all these tablets the term *I-shih* (literally, heroes who opposed the Manchus) was used. Besides, some members' specific hierarchical positions in the secret society were inscribed on the tablets and they are in line with the Triad positions.

These 72 names constitute only a subsidiary set of data. The principal source of data is the set of inscriptions collected and edited by Chen and Tan (1972).<sup>6</sup> The set of inscriptions has been classified by the editors into nine major categories as follows: temple, dialect association (*hui-kuan*), public cemetery, clannish shrine, school, private hospital, tombstone, church and monument. The last four categories of inscrip-

#### Footnote 5 (cont.)

- 1869 Renovation of the same bridge (only by the Hakkas, i.e., Chia-ying and Feng-Yung-Ta Hakkas)
- 1870 Erection of a fence at Fu Te Tz'u (Kuang-Hui Chao)
- 1879 Pan Yu Hui Kuan (Cantonese)
- 1880 Ch'ung Chou Hui Kuan (Hainanese)
- 1880 Kuang Fu Ku Miao (Removed and renovated by the Kuang-fu and Chao-ch'ing Cantonese)
- 1884\* ('Autumn') Renovation of the Li Chi Bridge (Cantonese and Hakkas/Kuang-Hui-Chao, Feng-Yung-Ta and Chia-ying)
- 1884\* ('Winter') Renovation of the same bridge (only Chia-ying Hakkas)
- 1887 Settlement of quarrels at Fu Te Tz'u. (Kuang-Hui-Chao vs. Feng-Yung-Ta and Chia-ying). Note: It was found that the Hainanese, Hokkiens and Teochius had earlier also contributed to this particular temple.
- 1887 Shuang Lung Shan Public Cemetery (Chia-ying Hakkas)
- 1890 Pi Shan T'ing Public Cemetery (Kuang-Hui-Chao)
- 1903 Hui Chou Hui Kuan (Hui-chou Cantonese)
- 1906 Ying Hsing School (Chia-ying and Hui-chou)
- 1907 Yang Cheng School (Kuang-Hui-Chao). Note: Hui-chou went back to Kuang-Hui-Chao group. As a result, the site of Ying Hsing School was removed to Ying Ho Kuan. See Imahore (1972:143).

<sup>6</sup> Part of the inscriptions had earlier appeared in Jao's (1969) work which does not contain names of donors.

tions are excluded in the present study as the contents are irrelevant. Also not included in this study are the twentieth-century inscriptions as names of the donors for the period after the Great Revolution (1910) in China are not fully presented by the editors.

The general format of the inscriptions includes, among other things, the title of the inscription, the main text on the purpose of the organized task, the office bearers' names and positions, name of the donors, sum of the donations, and the date of inserting the inscription. Our primary concern is with those inscriptions which bear personal names of the donors. Altogether we have 5,700 entries or name-cases after excluding the following items:

1. Donors who subscribed only fifty cents (the smallest donation). The number of these donors totalled 321 persons and/or shops (Chen and Tan, 1972:89-92, 244). It accounts for about 6 per cent of the total cases.<sup>7</sup>
2. Shops. It is extremely difficult to associate the name of a shop with dialect origin.
3. Names which are beyond identification, nicknames and incomplete names.<sup>8</sup> The percentage is negligible.
4. Names that have not been included by the editors<sup>9</sup> (Chen and Tan, 1972:107, 148, 151, 152, 154). This constitutes about 10 per cent of the total entries.

*Research Methods and Techniques:* The central concept of our study is cross dialect/locality group participation, in simple terms, cross-participation. Operationally, cross-participation is indicated by the appearance of a name in more than one piece of inscription, and each of these inscriptions was inserted for a different dialect group. For example, the fact of cross-participation is established if we find the name of a person in two pieces of inscriptions, one of which was erected for the Hakkas while the other for the Hokkiens.

The level of cross-participation is to be judged at two counts: the total number of such cross-appearing names and the relative size of contributions. While the former concept is self-explanatory, the latter does need some explanation. Relative size of contributions is mainly measured by the dispersion of contributions made to two different dialect organizations by the cross participants.

<sup>7</sup> Some of those donors gave only the names of their own shops.

<sup>8</sup> This is especially the case for the female donors. Usually, a female donor gave the husband's surname together with her own family name.

<sup>9</sup> The number of names omitted is given by Chen and Tan (1972: 151) in three of the four purposive omissions. The recorded omissions totalled more than 585 cases.

The procedure involved in locating the cross-appearing names consists of five steps. First, all (except the excluded) names of donors were romanized according to the Wade-Giles system. Second, the romanized names were converted into numbers by assigning each alphabet a digit ranging from 01 to 26. The numbers were then coded and keypunched on IBM cards. Together with each numeralized name is a corresponding case identification number.

Thereafter the IBM cards were sorted out by a counter sorter. This fourth step is to group together the cards that bear the same names. As on the back of each punched IBM card there was previously recorded a donor's name in its original Chinese characters, the size of donation and the location (i.e., pagination) of the particular name in Chen and Tan's book (1972), later reference to the original text for more information about the donor could thus be made. Finally, all the cards were carefully studied to locate the cross-appearing names.

## The Findings

### 1. *Level of Cross Participation: Frequency of Cross-Appearing Names*

The general findings from the present study are that there are some degrees of cross-dialect participation among the major Chinese dialect groups in nineteenth-century Singapore (Diagram 1). These major dialect groups are the Hokkiens, the Hakkas and the Cantonese. The Hainanese, a minor dialect group, is found not to be related to any dialect group during the same period.<sup>10</sup>

TABLE I  
*Frequency of Cross-Dialect Participation among the Major Dialect Groups*

	Cantonese	Hakkas	Hokkiens	Hakkas/ Cantonese	Unidentified persons*
Cantonese	—	20	5	—	[3]*
Hakkas	—	—	8	—	[3]*
Hokkiens	—	—	—	1	[3]*
Hakkas/Cantonese	—	—	—	—	—

\* Three persons each contributed to three organizations of different dialect origins. The three persons are termed here 'the unidentified persons.'

<sup>10</sup> This is based on the names of two pieces of inscription: Ch'iung Chou Hui Kuan and Fu Hsi She (Chen and Tan, 1972: 206-10, 275-7). The latter piece of inscription was inserted in 1907.



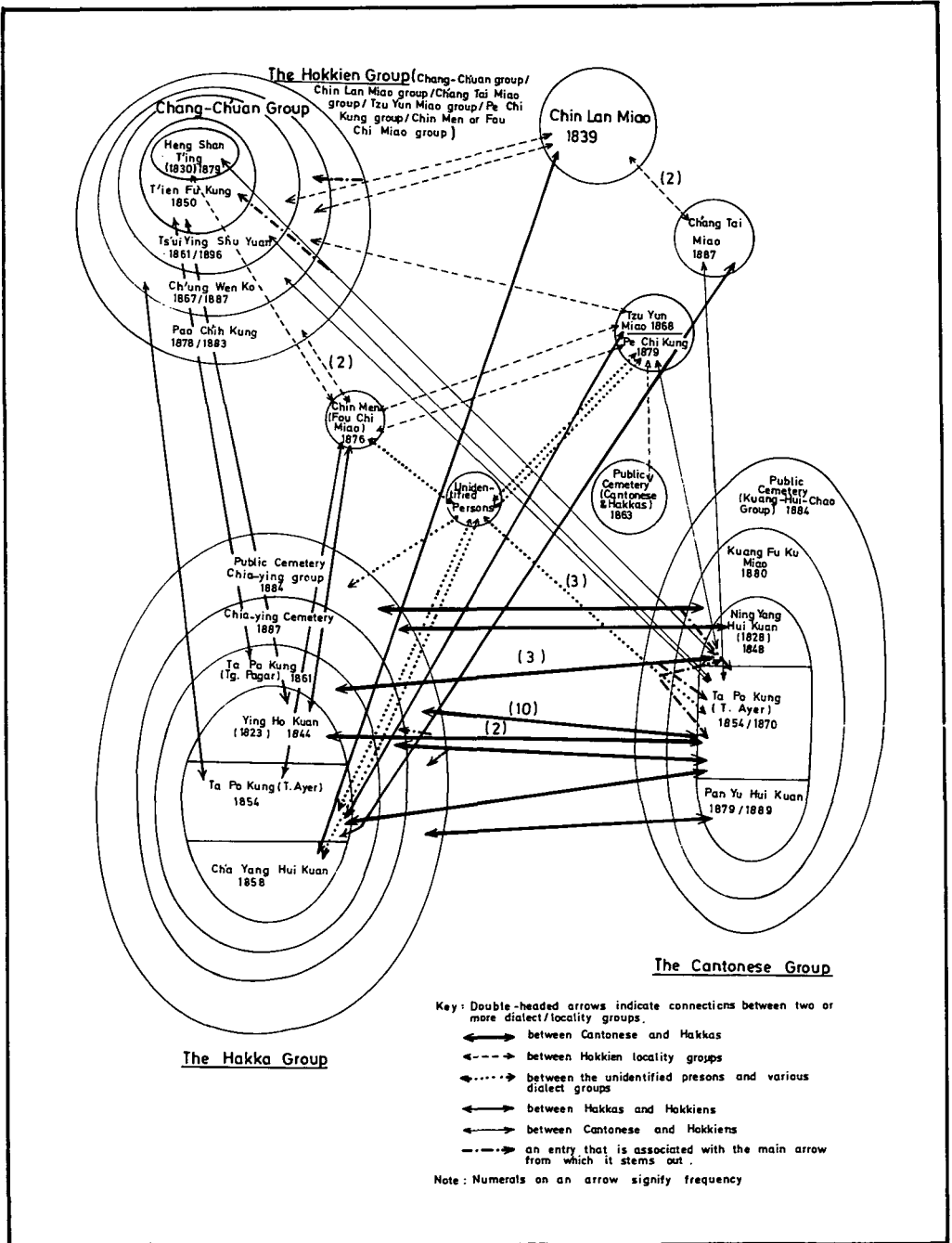


TABLE 2  
*Frequency of Cross-Participation among the Hokkien Locality Subgroups*

	Chang- Ch'uan	Ch'ang-tai	Chin-men	Chin Lan Miao	Pe Chi Kung and Tzu Yun Miao
Chang-Ch'uan	—	0	3	2	1
Ch'ang-tai		—	0	2	0
Chin-men			—	0	2
Chin Lan Miao				—	0

Among the major dialect groups, as can be seen from Table 1, the Hokkiens were related to the Hakkas in eight cross-participation counts (or simply, counts), to the Cantonese in five counts, to the Hakkas/Cantonese combined group in one count. On the other hand, the Hakkas were related to the Cantonese in 20 counts, in addition to the frequent organizational or official cross participation.

*Within the Hokkien Group:* The Hokkien group was not a homogeneous group in terms of social activity. A classification of the inscription data shows that there were at least three distinct Hokkien locality groups and three undetermined Hokkien groups. The three distinct groups are the Chang-Ch'uan group, the Ch'ang-tai group and the Chin-men group. The undetermined groups refer to the Chin Lan Miao group, the Pe Chi Kung and the Tzu Yun Miao group. While five of these six groups were each simple in its composition, that of the Chang-Ch'uan group was not. It was in fact the principal sponsor of the Heng Shan T'ing, T'ien Fu Kung, Tz'ui Ying Shu Yuan, Ch'ung Wen Ko and Pao Ch'ih Kung. Although Tan (1972) found that the Chang-Ch'uan group was not organizationally affiliated with the Chin Lan Miao group,

TABLE 3  
*Frequency of Cross Participation between the Hokkien Locality Subgroups and Other Dialect Groups*

	Chang- Ch'uan	Ch'ang-tai	Chin-men	Chin Lan Miao	Pe Chi Kung and Tzu Yun Miao
Cantonese	3	1	1	0	1
Hakkas	3	1	2	0	1
Hakkas and Cantonese	0	0	0	0	1
Unidentified-persons	0	0	[1]*	0	[2]*

\* The same person contributed to three organizations of different dialect origins. See also note in Table 1.

our findings (Table 2) show that at the individual level the Chang-Ch'uan group was related to the Chin Lan Miao in two counts. Similarly, while Imahore (1972) advocated that the Chang-Ch'uan people were administratively unrelated to the Chin-men group, we find that the two were related in three counts at the individual level. However, the Chang-Ch'uan people were not related to the Ch'ang-tai people at all. The remaining interaction patterns being that the Ch'ang-tai group was related only to Chin Lan Miao in two counts, and the Chin-men group to Tzu Yun Miao and Pe Chi Kung with one count each.

*The Hokkien Subgroups and Other Dialect Groups:* All the six Hokkien subgroups, except Chin Lan Miao, had interacted with other dialect groups (Table 3). Of the five subgroups, the Chang-Ch'uan group which was thought to be the most exclusive dialect/locality group (Tan, 1972), was surprisingly ranked highest in frequency of cross participation with the subgroups and other dialect groups. Members from this group had taken part in the activities organized by the Cantonese on three occasions and also those of the Hakkas on three other occasions. Second in order was the Chin-men group which interacted with the Cantonese only on one occasion and twice with the Hakkas. The Ch'ang-tai group was third in order, followed by the Pe Chi Kung and Tzu Yun Miao groups whose combined score on cross participation was only three counts.

### 2. *Level of Cross Participation: Relative Size of Contributions*

The above-mentioned findings reveal that cross dialect participation did occur among the three major dialect groups at the individual level. To reiterate, level of cross participation is higher between the Cantonese and the Hakkas, followed by that between the Hakkas and the Hokkiens. The Cantonese and the Hokkiens did not interact as frequently. The level of interaction has so far been measured by frequency counting. There is also a quality aspect of social participation. This refers to the relative contribution which is defined as the difference between two amounts of donations given by any cross participant. Two simple measurements are used to operationalize the concept. The first measurement is the standard deviation of the differences between the major (bigger sum) and the minor (smaller) donations. The second measurement is based on the numbers of major and minor donations. The former measures the degree of homogeneity of the difference between two related donations, while the latter, the cross participants' discriminatory attitude.

TABLE 4  
*Mean and Standard Deviation of the Differences in Donations Given by Cross-Participants\**

<i>Cross participants</i>	$\mu$	$\sigma$	$\nu$	No. of cases
Cantonese and Hakkas	\$3	\$3.11	1.04	18†
Cantonese and Hokkiens	28	32.23	1.15	4‡
Hakkas and Hokkiens	76	161.05	1.83	7‡

*Notes:*

$\mu$  = Mean value of the differences between the major and the minor contributions.

$\sigma$  = Standard deviation of the differences between the major and the minor contributions.

$\nu$  = Coefficient of variability.

\* Economic inflation during that period has not been taken into consideration, its effects are only assumed to be random.

† Two cases are excluded. In one case, the donor's two contributions yielded a difference of \$980 which alone would have inflated the value of  $\sigma$  to \$218.72. Considering the fact the donor's minor donation was also one of the biggest contributions (\$20), we exclude the case. In another, a contributor had not made an explicit donation.

‡ Excluding a case where the contribution was two plots of land.

It can be seen from Table 4 that the standard deviation of the differences between the major and the minor donations for the cross participants involved in Cantonese and Hakka suborganizations is the smallest. It accounts for only \$3.11; that for the Hakka and the Hokkien cross participants yields the highest of \$161.05. A value of \$32.23 was computed for the Cantonese and the Hokkien cross participants. These standard deviation measurements indicate that the sums of donations given by a cross participant to the Cantonese and the Hakka suborganizations varies very slightly, with a difference of about \$3.11 only, as compared to the much bigger differences in the size of donations made by a cross participant to the Hakka/Hokkien and the Cantonese/Hokkien suborganizations. These findings suggest that among others, the Cantonese and the Hakkas treated each other on a fairly equal basis. Such an equality in relationship was not manifested between the Hokkiens and the Cantonese or between the Hokkiens and the Hakkas. This suggestion can further be supported by the following findings.

In terms of numbers of major and minor donations, the cross-participants contributed almost at par to both the Cantonese and the Hakka suborganizations. It is indicated in Table 5 that of the 19 participants contributing to only the Cantonese and the Hakkas, six made major contributions to the Cantonese suborganizations and another six to the Hakka suborganizations. The rest gave equal amounts

TABLE 5  
*Characteristics of Major Contributions Made to Three Major Dialect Groups by Cross-Participants\**

Total cases	Major contributions to:			No. of equal contributions
	Cantonese No. ( $\mu$ )	Hakkas No. ( $\mu$ )	Hokkiens No. ( $\mu$ )	
4†	0	—	4 (\$28)	0
7‡	—	1 (\$38)	5 (\$98.4)	1
19	6 (\$2.88)	6 (\$3.33)	—	7

*Notes:*

$\mu$  = Mean value of the differences between the major and the minor contributions.

\* Economic inflation during that period has *not* been taken into consideration. Its effects are assumed to be random.

† Excluding a case where the contribution was a plot of land.

‡ Excluding a case where the contribution was not a monetary donation.

|| Excluding only the case where the contribution was a plot of land. See also Table 4, note †.

to both the dialect groups' suborganizations. This pattern is however not observed in the contributions made between the Hokkien and the Cantonese suborganizations. Instead, a distinct proportion of the contributions made were in favour of the Hokkien suborganizations. Of the seven cases of contributions made only to the Hokkien and the Hakka suborganizations, five major contributions were for the Hokkien. In the case between the Hokkien and the Cantonese suborganizations, the cross participants made all four major contributions to the Hokkien suborganizations.

Summing up the findings on relative contributions, we find it reasonable to suggest that the relationship between the Hokkiens and the non-Hokkiens was either superficial or non-social, especially in the light of the Hokkiens' high socioeconomic status in nineteenth-century Singapore.

### 3. *Periods of Cross-Participation*

The earliest cross-participation, and also that between the Hokkiens and the Cantonese, took place in the year 1848, eight years after the first Cantonese/Hakka public cemetery was built. This refers to a donation given to the Ning Yang Hui Kuan (Cantonese) by a person who had in 1830 contributed to the Chang-Ch'uan group's (Hokkien) Heng Shan T'ing. The latest cross-participation before the end of the nineteenth-century was registered in 1879 when a person associated with both the

Ning Yang Hui Kuan and the Ta Po Kung Miao made a contribution to the Hokkien Pe Chi Kung. At the group level, although there were calls for donations by the Committee of the Ch'ung Wen School in the year 1887 and T'sui Ying School in the year 1896, both of which were established by the Chang-Ch'uan people, no contributions were made by the Cantonese.

For a period of about 40 years, it may be said that there was interaction between the Hokkien and the Cantonese at the individual level though not at the organizational level.

Cross-participation between the Hakkas and the Hokkiens started slightly *later* than that between the Cantonese and the Hokkiens. The earliest cross-participation between the Hakkas and the Hokkiens was reflected in a contribution given to the Hokkien T'ien Fu Kung in 1850 by a person attached to the Hakka Ying Ho Kuan (1844 inscription). The latest contact before the twentieth century between the Hakkas and the Hokkiens was made in 1884 when the Director of the Hokkien Pe Chi Kung (1879 inscription) made a contribution to the Hakka's Chia Ying Public Cemetery. The Chia-ying's new public cemetery established in 1887 registered no donation from persons connected with the Hokkiens.

Interaction between the Cantonese and the Hakkas at the organizational level dates back to 1840 when the Kuang-tung Yung-ting Public Cemetery was first renovated. After 1840 the Cantonese and the Hakkas had some splits of opinion which resulted in intermittent separations. Although at the *organizational* level both of these dialect groups might have put an end to their co-operation after 1854,<sup>11</sup> we observed that at the *individual* level the last count of cross-participation ended only in 1894 when a person attached to the Hakka's Public cemetery (1884) donated a sum for renovating the Ning Yang Hui Kuan in 1894. Moreover, of the 20 counts of cross-participation between the Cantonese and the Hakkas, a total of 17 counts in fact materialized after 1854.

#### 4. Activity Patterns

Tan (1972) has implied that the secret societies, public cemeteries and shrines were organizations in which membership was more diversified than others in terms of dialect origin. We have found that the leaders of a secret society in the 1850s, probably the Ghee Hin Kongs, were composed of five Hakkas, four Cantonese, one Hokkien and another of

<sup>11</sup> See note 5, above.

either Cantonese or Hakka origin. It is likely that secret societies were a significant melting pot for people from different dialect origins. Unfortunately, the degree of exhaustiveness of this subsidiary set of data is not known, and hence results derived from this set of data can only serve as a reference and cannot be used for direct comparison with that abstracted from the principal inscriptions.

TABLE 6  
*Dialect Origin of the Members of a Secret Society according to their Organizational Involvements*

Dialect Origin and Suborganizations	No. of secret society members
<i>Hakka</i>	
Ta Po Kung (T. Ayer)	1
Ta Po Kung (T. Ayer)/Ch'a Yang Hui Kuan/ Ta Po Kung (T. Pagar)	1
Ch'a Yang Hui Kuan	1
Ch'a Yang Hui Kuan/Ta Po Kung (T. Pagar)	1
Ta Po Kung (T. Pagar)	1
	5
<i>Cantonese</i>	
Ta Po Kung (T. Ayer)	2
Ta Po Kung (T. Ayer)/Ning Yang Hui Kuan	1
Ning Yang Hui Kuan	1
	4
<i>Cantonese and Hakkas</i>	
Public Cemetery (Cantonese and Hakka)/ Ning Yang Hui Kuan	1
	1
<i>Hokkien</i>	
Ch'ung Wen Ko & Tzu Yun Miao	1
	1

The rigidity/flexibility of other suborganizations is indicated in the kind of suborganizational activities involved by the cross-participants. An overall counting on cross-participation in the suborganizations of the major dialect groups, i.e., the Hokkiens, Cantonese and Hakkas, reveals that temples are ranked highest, a count of 41 points plus six points for the involvements of the three unidentified persons (UP) (Tables 7, 8 and 9). Public cemeteries ranked second with 17 counts plus one count from UP, while dialect associations received 12 counts plus two counts from UP, and schools received only three counts. Conceivably, the system boundary of the religious organizations—temples and cemeteries—is least rigid compared to that of other kinds of suborganizations.

TABLE 7  
*Ranking of Cantonese Suborganizations according to the Frequency of Involvements by Cross-Participants*

Rank	Suborganizations	Frequency
1	Temples	
	Ta Po Kung at Telok Ayer ([1854] 1870) Kuang Fu Ku Miao (1880)	20[2]* 1
		21[2]
2	Dialect Associations	
	Ning Yang Hui Kuan (1848) Pan Yu Hui Kuan (1879)	6[1]* 1
3	Public Cemeteries †	0
		7[1]
	<b>Total</b>	<b>28† [3]</b>

*Notes:*

\* Contributions given by unidentified persons. See also note in Table 1.

† It should be noted, however, that the Cantonese and the Hakkas had intensive interaction on public cemetery activities at the organizational level. See, for example, Chen and Tan (1972: 231 ff.).

‡ Included three double contributions, i.e., contributions given by a cross participant to two suborganizations belonging to the same dialect group. Double contribution is indicated in Diagram 1 by a dashed arrow branching out from a solid arrow.

TABLE 8  
*Ranking of the Hakka Suborganizations according to the Frequency of Involvements by Cross-Participants*

Rank	Suborganizations	Frequency
1	Public Cemeteries	
	Chia-ying group renovation (1884) Chia-ying cemetery (1887)	14[1]* 2
		16[1]
2	Temples	
	Ta Po Kung at Telok Ayer (1854) Ta Po Kung at Tanjong Pagar (1861)	5[1] 4
		9[1]
3	Dialect Associations	
	Ying Ho Kuan (1823 1844) Cha Yang Hui Kuan (1858)	4 1[1]
		5[1]
	<b>Total</b>	<b>30† [3]</b>

\* Contributions made by unidentified persons. See also note in Table 1.

† Double contributions included. See Table 7, note ‡ for an explanation of the term.



TABLE 9  
*Ranking of the Hokkien Suborganizations according to the Frequency  
of Involvements by Cross-Participants of Non-Hokkien Origin*

Rank	Suborganizations	Frequency
1	Temples	
	T'ien Fu Kung (1850)	3
	Fou Chi Miao (1876)	2[1]*
	Pe Chi Kung (1879)	2[1]
	Ch'ang Tai Miao (1887)	2
	Chin Lan Miao (1839)	1
	Tzu Yun Miao (1868)	1[1]
		11[3]
2	Schools	3
3	Public Cemetery	1
4	Clannish Shrine	0
	Total	15†[3]

\* Contributions made by unidentified persons. See also note in Table 1.

† Double contributions included. See Table 7, note ‡ for an explanation of the term.

A breakdown of the findings along dialect lines shows about the same pattern. Among the Cantonese (Table 9), their temples received more cross-participation counts compared to their other suborganizations, namely, dialect associations, clannish shrine and schools. With slight deviation, the Hakkas' public cemeteries (Table 8) received more counts than the temples.

A study on the activity patterns also reveals that the system boundary of the Cantonese and the Hakka dialect associations was relatively flexible. On the other hand, the Hokkiens built schools much earlier than the Cantonese and the Hakkas, although it is not known whether the relatively learned Hakka migrants were recruited to teach the Hokkien children in that early period. Their schools received three counts (Table 9). But their clannish shrine, namely, Pao Ch'ih Kung, was not involved by people outside the Hokkien group.

The Chang-Ch'uan people have attracted special attention of students on Chinese immigrants in the early Settlements. This is so not only because of their population size and early migration history, but also because of their influential socio-economic status. Despite the fact that as a locality group their system boundary has often been considered most rigid, there are variations in system flexibility among their suborganizations. It is found that the system boundary of the schools

established by the Chang-Ch'uan people is least rigid compared to that of temple, shrine and public cemetery. Of the 14 cross-participation counts from the non-Hokkien communities and other Hokkien locality groups, as indicated in Table 10, the schools alone scored seven points.

TABLE 10  
*Ranking of the Chang-Chuan People's Suborganizations according to the Frequency of Involvements by Cross-Participants*

Rank	Suborganizations	Frequency
1	Schools	
	Ts'ui Ying Shu Yuan (1861)	2
	Ch'ung Wen Ko (1867)	5*
		7
2	Temple	
	T'ien Fu Kung (1850)	3*
		3
3	Clannish Shrine	
	Pao Ch'ih Kung (1878)	2
		2
4	Public Cemetery	
	Heng Shan T'ing (1830)	2
		2
	Total	14

\* Double contributions included. See Table 7, note ‡ for an explanation of the term.

### Discussion and Conclusion

From the findings presented above one could easily observe that cross-dialect involvement at the individual level is highly in line with that at the organizational level. That is, the system boundaries of the Cantonese group and the Hakka group were less rigid than that of the Hokkien group. It was also indicated that the Cantonese and the Hakkas were closer to each other than each to the Hokkiens. The general and conventional explanation for the high level of symbiotic relationship between the Cantonese and the Hakkas would be that they were the minority groups. In order to compete with the socially and economically well-established Hokkiens they would have to mobilize all possible resources, including solidarity, into a concerted whole. This explanation follows the Marxian tradition in that the oppressed unite to fight for a common cause. The Marxian model becomes more plausible when one

further considers the Chinese occupational structure in the early Straits Settlements. Elsewhere the present author (Mak, forthcoming) has demonstrated that the Hokkiens monopolized the economically more lucrative occupations such as import and export, shipping and trading. De-monopolization of these lucrative occupations of course requires concerted effort of the minority groups.

However, common interest is only an external factor for unity of the oppressed. There is also an internal, or socio-cultural factor that facilitates such a symbiotic process. For instance, Form (1973) found that the workers in each of the four automobile factories in four different countries were in fact not a homogeneous group although they were the 'oppressed' in the Marxian sense. In the process of their daily interaction the skilled workers developed an activity pattern and a subculture which were dissimilar to that of the semi-skilled and unskilled workers. In the case of the relationship between the Cantonese and the Hakkas, their many organizational and individual co-operations are likely to have been made possible by the similarity of their dialects, in addition to a felt need for occupational de-monopolization. If such were not the case, one would logically expect the Chin-men people and the Ch'ang-tai people to unite with the Cantonese and the Hakkas. Unless, perhaps, we are willing to assume that the Chin-men and the Ch'ang-tai people did not feel that they were being deprived of their occupational statuses and opportunities, in contrast with the case of the Cantonese and the Hakkas.

Away from the Marxian deprivation model of explanation, an assimilation model may help to explain the segmentation between the Hokkiens and the rest. A substantial number of the Hokkiens, especially the Chang-Ch'uan people, had been assimilated into the local Malacca Malay society (and hence the term *Baba* Chinese applied to them) long before the opening up of Singapore in 1819. Moreover, inscription data also reveal that some of the Chang-Ch'uan influentials in fact immigrated from Malacca (Jao, 1969). As such, one naturally expects a certain degree of social discrepancy between the Hokkiens and the non-Hokkiens.

Tan (1972) has remarked that the Chang-Ch'uan people formed an exclusive group. In a way, our findings (Tables 2 and 3) indicate that the Chang-Ch'uan group at the individual level, both within and outside the Hokkien community, was not as exclusive a locality group as the Ch'ang-tai group was. This assumes that the temporal factor did not play a significant role in cross dialect participation. If it is assumed otherwise, then the Chang-Ch'uan people's system boundary should be considered most rigid, either within or outside the Hokkien community.

For instance, the Chang-Ch'uan people had a total (see Tables 2 and 3) of 11 cross-participation counts over a period of 61 years, or only 0.18 counts per year while the Ch'ang-tai people had 4 counts in 13 years, or 0.31 counts per year.<sup>12</sup> However, owing to the low total cross-participation counts and the closeness of such counts per year between the two Hokkien groups, interpretation of such a difference is not likely to be meaningful unless and until other related evidence is furnished.

The level of individual cross-participation between the Hokkiens and the non-Hokkiens is, however low, noteworthy, especially in the light of the fact that at the organizational level the former were said to be quite unrelated to the latter (Imahore, 1972; Tan, 1972). We believe that such relations at the individual level are not unintentional, rather, they are a result of contrived, if indirect, behaviour.<sup>13</sup> Most probably, such interactions were a logical development out of business exchange between the Hokkiens and the non-Hokkiens, which assumed the form of donations to non-business organizations. That is, should the cross-participant be a non-Hokkien, he could have donated to the Hokkien suborganizations out of business indebtedness. And a Hokkien's contribution to non-Hokkien suborganizations could either be a reciprocal gesture or, likewise, a business compliment. Such complimentary and reciprocal exchange of gifts had been and still is widely practised among the traditional Chinese in business circles.

We further observe that most of the cross-participants were connected with the temples and public cemeteries. This underlines the flexibility of the system boundary of Chinese religious and ancestral worshipping organizations. In other words, constraints on accepting donations from out-groups, and on allowing members to donate outwardly, are less

<sup>12</sup> The procedures involved in the calculation of cross-participation counts are as follows: Assuming that the Chang-Ch'uan people (Heng Shan T'ing, 1830) would have started contributions to the next earliest Chin Lan Miao which was erected in 1839, then, there is a difference of 61 years from 1839 to 1900. The 11 counts (see Tables 2 and 3) are then divided by 61 years to yield the 0.18 cross-participation counts per year. For the Ch'ang-tai group, the same method of calculation applies. Even if we break the total cross-participation counts into that within the Hokkien context and that outside the Hokkien context, the rank of rigidity of system boundary between the Chang-Ch'uan and the Ch'ang-tai people remains unchanged as far as the temporal factor is being considered.

<sup>13</sup> The ecological factor, particularly residential segregation along dialect lines, may play a part in the cross dialect involvement at the individual level. It is quite possible that a person belonging to a minority dialect group would contribute to the organizations established by the dominant dialect group along the same street, or within the same area. In spite of the fact that such residential segregation patterns have been observed (Mak, forthcoming), they are, however, not useful for the present purpose as they were constructed on the basis of each dialect group's symbolic constructions.

rigidly imposed upon these suborganizations than on other suborganizations such as dialect associations and schools. In sum, the rigidity of system boundary was moderated by business exchange relations which in turn found their expression in religious deeds.

On the acceptance of out-group donations, two major factors may help to explain the flexibility of Chinese religious norms. First, the traditional Chinese were not truly religion-oriented and by virtue of this cultural trait religious membership was classless and external to dialect ties. It is therefore not surprising to find that all of the three major dialect groups honoured the Ta-po-kung, a patron deity, in nineteenth-century Singapore (Chen and Tan, 1972: 56–7, 70ff, 94ff). This particular factor may account for the receptiveness of Chinese religious and related organizations in accepting donations from people of all walks of life.

Second, diffused or folk rather than institutional religion was more deep-rooted in the daily life of the average Chinese (Yang, 1961: 294–5) and this was especially the case for the early Chinese immigrants who had travelled a long sea voyage to sojourn in a foreign land. Tutillary deities such as Ta-po-kung, Ma-tsu and Kuan-ti were more commonly worshipped than other gods. On the other hand, since the deceased were not likely to be shipped back to their homeland for burial, that more premium was placed on the significance of burial grounds by the Chinese immigrants would be expected. Precisely as these two kinds of activity were of core importance to the early Chinese immigrants of all dialect origins, contributions made to these organizations would be received with deeper appreciation.

In contrast, educational activity was comparatively not as exigent considering the migrant background of the Chinese and their intention to repatriate. That the Hokkiens initiated the establishment of the earliest schools, namely, the Ts'ui Ying Shu Yuan and Ch'ung Wen Ko, was largely promoted by the kinds of occupation they were engaged in. Occupations such as import and export and shipping would normally require some formal education on the part of the incumbents to enable them to handle daily transactions. Or alternatively, the children who were assisting and who would be likely to succeed the incumbents, would be asked to learn the Chinese language in the formal way for commercial purposes.

On the other hand, it is likely that the size of a dialect community would constitute a motivational factor for establishing schools. Population censuses of the Straits Settlements for the years 1881, 1891 and 1901 indicated that the Hokkiens (not including the Straits-born Chinese)

were a numerically dominant and fast-growing dialect group in Singapore. Even more pertinent is the fact that their younger male generation of the age group 15 and below also outnumbered those of other dialect groups during the same periods. Their felt needs arising from the continual growth of their people, coupled with their incomparable wealth should provide us with another set of explanatory factors in accounting for the Hokkiens' early setting up of two schools in Singapore.

Besides the temples and public cemeteries, secret societies also seemed to be an organization in which the system boundary was relatively less rigid. Although the results of secret society membership are derived from a different set of data, they are, however, instructive, for they help to reveal the dialect background of some of the members. According to the data, a certain secret society in Singapore during the 1850s was composed of members of Hokkien, Cantonese and Hakka origins. This dialect-neutrality of Chinese secret societies was in fact well entrenched in the Triad Society's principle of sworn brotherhood. That was even further reinforced by the organizations' provision of sign language for bridging the 'language' gap (Mak, forthcoming). However, Triad organizations of different dialect labels were later recorded in the late nineteenth century. This could mean the eclipse of the Triad ideology and the end of the universality criterion for Triad membership. Either coincidentally, concomitantly, or even causally, the latest contribution of that century between the Hokkiens and the Cantonese was registered in 1879; that between the Hokkiens and the Hakkas in 1884, and that between the Cantonese and the Hakkas in 1894.

However undesirable the activities of the Chinese secret societies in the eyes of the colonists, without their operation the Chinese in the early Settlements would definitely have been more segmented and divided along the speech lines.

To recapitulate, the individual level of cross-participation in a broader sense corresponds with the organizational level of group affiliation. That is, where the Hokkiens were not having organizational relations with other dialect groups, cross-participation involving the Hokkiens was also low. In contrast, the cross-participation level was high between the Cantonese and the Hakkas whose organizational relations had been frequent and dynamic. Most of these individual-level relations were expressed in a religious form.

In conclusion, there are obvious limitations underlying the novelty of the approach employed in the present study. The gravest limitation lies in the unavailability of accounts on the dialect origin of most of the cross-participants. Such information would certainly enable us sub-

stantially to specify the level and the nature of system rigidity of each of the dialect groups. Moreover, a more general pattern of cross-participation would be constructed if we could extend the present study to cover cases beyond the nineteenth century and also cases in the other two Straits Settlements, namely, Malacca and Penang. A final word of caution is that the scope for generalizing from the present findings is confined only to the recorded inscription data provided by Chen and Tan (1972).

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## Selected Glossary

Cantonese (Kuang-fu) 廣府人／話	Hokkien/s (Fukienese) 福建話／人
Ch'a Yang Hui Kuan 茶陽會館	I-shih 義士
Chang-Ch'uan 漳泉	Kuang Fu Ku Miao 廣福古廟
Ch'ang Tai Miao 長泰廟	Kuang-Hui-Chao 廣惠肇
Chang-chou 漳州	Nin Yang Hui Kuan 寧陽會館
Chia-ying 嘉應	Pao Ch'ih Kung 保赤宮
Chin Lan Miao 金蘭廟	Pan Yu Hui Kuan 番禺會館
Chin Men 金門	Pe Chi Kung 北極宮
Ch'uan-chou 泉州	She Kung Miao 社公廟
Ch'ung Wen Ko 崇文閣	Ta Po Kung Miao 大伯公廟
Feng-Yung-Ta 豐永大	T'ien Fu Kung 天福宮
Fou Chi Miao 浮濟廟	Ts'ui Ying Shu Yuan 萃英書院
Hakka/s (K'e-chia) 客家話／人	Tzu Yun Miao 紫雲廟
Hainanese (Hai-nan) 海南話／人	Wu Hu Tz'u 五虎祠
Heng Shan T'ing 恒山亭	Ying Ho Kuan 應和館