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Understanding the Other in a Foreign Land：A Preliminary Case Study of Malay Language Learning Texts among Hakka and Cantonese Migrants in British Malaya

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Abstract

Since the Ming dynasty voyages of Zheng He, Chinese migration to Southeast Asia has extended over several centuries. While earlier migratory routes largely focused on port cities such as Makassar, Batavia, and Manila, a new wave of migration from the mid-nineteenth century onward increasingly shifted toward the Malay Peninsula and Borneo. Many of these migrants settled permanently, forming the historical foundations of contemporary Chinese communities in Malaysia. Despite their significance, the ways in which early migrants adapted to unfamiliar environments, linguistic barriers, and cultural differences remain insufficiently examined, particularly with regard to how language learning facilitated everyday life and economic activities.Among Chinese migrants in colonial British Malaya, Hakka and Cantonese communities constituted a substantial proportion. Owing to their relative phonological and lexical proximity, these groups provide a valuable lens for examining early Chinese linguistic practices in Malaya. This article analyzes two Malay language learning booklets published between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—Zheng Ke Yin Yi Mu Lai You Hua (正客音译义木来由话) and Malayu Yue Yin Yi Yi (马拉语粤音译义). Through textual analysis, it explores how Hakka and Cantonese migrants learned and conceptualized the Malay language under colonial conditions, with particular attention to lexical selection and the organization of practical knowledge. By comparing these two texts, the study reconstructs aspects of everyday social contexts and examines how different Chinese speech communities formed understandings of the Malay language and local society. In doing so, it offers a preliminary perspective on migrant language learning and cross-cultural knowledge formation in colonial Malaya.

Keywords: Oversea Chinese , Hakka Communities, Cantonese Communities, Malay learning , Language Contact.

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1.0 Introduction

The history of Chinese migration to Southeast Asia extends far back in time; however, when considering large-scale and sustained transregional movements, a key turning point can be traced to the period following Zheng He's maritime expeditions during the Ming dynasty (1405–1433). Although the voyages of Zheng He's fleets did not themselves constitute popular or civilian migration, their historical significance lay in the effective facilitation of maritime transport networks and the circulation of information across regions, thereby reshaping patterns of regional maritime connectivity. As shipping routes and navigational knowledge accumulated, places such as Manila, Batavia (present-day Jakarta), Melaka, and Siam gradually emerged as important nodes for the movement, anchorage, and activities of Chinese merchants and sojourners, laying the groundwork for the subsequent formation of Chinese communities in Southeast Asia（Skinner, 1957）. However, the decisive shift that gradually made the Malay Peninsula a major center of Chinese settlement occurred in the second half of the eighteenth century. At that time, the financial position of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) was increasingly weakened, while Chinese merchants and laborers who had previously moved between Batavia and other regional ports began to redirect their networks—encompassing opium, mining, and labor mobilization—towards the Malay Peninsula, Makassar, and Borneo. This reorientation undermined the VOC's established port revenues and commercial monopolies, further exacerbating its already fragile finances, and simultaneously encouraged the dispersal of Chinese activities from Batavia to other ports and resource sites across the region (Blussé , 2011).

By the mid-nineteenth century, upheavals such as the Opium Wars and the Taiping Rebellion swept across China's coastal regions, dramatically intensifying the scale of southward Chinese migration. Migrants from Fujian, Guangdong, and Hakka-speaking areas successively entered Singapore, Perak, Johor, and Borneo, where they played pivotal roles within colonial tin-mining operations, rubber plantations, and port systems. Over time, these processes shaped the principal dialect-based communities of what is now Malaysian Chinese society and, through sustained interaction with Malay society, gave rise to hybrid social formations characterized by long-term negotiation and exchange.

As large numbers of Chinese migrants gradually settled across different parts of Malaysia in the second half of the nineteenth century, the primary challenges they encountered in everyday life, economic activities, and interethnic interactions were often not political institutions or religious differences, but the immediate and pressing problem of linguistic communication. Situated within unfamiliar linguistic and social environments, newly arrived migrants were required to learn, without delay, how to

communicate with local Malays, how to conduct transactions, and how to comprehend a range of local institutions, terms of address, and customary practices. Such knowledge not only had to be rapidly incorporated into migrants' cognitive and practical frameworks, but also profoundly shaped their daily modes of operation in spaces such as mines, ports, and marketplaces. From this perspective, language learning was not merely a form of acculturation, but a core condition that determined whether migrants could establish themselves locally and, indeed, sustain their livelihoods.

From the nineteenth century onwards, large numbers of Chinese migrants moved into Malaya, bringing about profound changes in demographic structures, economic activities, and local societies. With the rapid expansion of the tin-mining industry, the emergence of secret societies and lineage-based organizations, and the formation of transregional commercial networks, Chinese society under the colonial regime exhibited a high degree of mobility and organizational capacity. It was for this reason that such phenomena long attracted scholarly attention, and existing studies have produced a substantial body of analysis, primarily from macro-level perspectives focusing on social organization, labor systems, and ethnic relations.[1]

However, in comparison with these structural and institutional approaches, the role of language, as the most basic and frequently practised form of knowledge in migrants' everyday lives has long been relegated to a relatively secondary position. How Chinese migrants learned Malay, and how they understood and constructed the local social world through daily interactions, constitute a dimension of "daily knowledge production" that remains underexamined in existing scholarship and calls for further investigation.

2.0 Literature Review: Empire, Language, and Cross-Cultural Exchange

In the study of language exchange, Chinese-language scholarship has in fact accumulated a substantial body of research. The Hua Yi Yi Yu (华夷译语), compiled by the Ming dynasty' state, provides a representative example. As a linguistic reference work situated within an official knowledge system, it not only reflects the court's modes of classification and understanding of the languages of "Southeast Asian polities," but also reveals the political imagination and conceptions of order embedded in specific historical contexts. For these reasons, the Huayi Yiyu has in recent years become an important source for studies of Sino–foreign interactions, the production of linguistic knowledge, and practices of imperial governance, attracting scholarly attention

[1] See also Wong Yee Tuan, Penang Chinese Commerce in the Nineteenth Century*: The Rise and Fall of the Big Five* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2015)*;* Carl A. Trocki, *Opium and Empire: Chinese Society in Colonial Singapore, 1800–1910* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).

from perspectives ranging from diplomatic institutions to language ideologies and knowledge production (Chiang,2010;Lin,2015). In examining language contact and the exchange of knowledge between China and the Malay world, Malay-related language knowledge circulating within the Chinese textual tradition , particularly Malay loanwords preserved in Chinese sources can serve as important evidence for understanding long-term cultural interactions and the transmission of knowledge between China and maritime Southeast Asia (Salmon, 2009).

In recent years, interactions between empires—and the attendant issues of linguistic and cultural exchange have increasingly become a major focus of scholarly inquiry in Europe and North America. Scholars such as Tonio Andrade and Henrietta Harrison adopt cross-imperial perspectives to examine how language, ritual, and knowledge circulated across different political systems, were translated, and were reinterpreted within specific historical contexts. Henrietta Harrison (2021) takes the British embassies to China during the Qianlong reign as the core of her analysis, approaching them through the Qing linguistic regime and practices of translation. By tracing the life trajectories and experiences of two key interpreters— Li Zi Biao (李自标) and Sir George Thomas Staunton, 2nd Baronet. She offers a nuanced account of the complexities involved in managing cross-cultural communication within multilingual and multi-dialectal imperial contexts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. She argues that language was not merely a tool of communication, but a key constitutive element deeply embedded in political order, power relations, and the mechanisms of mutual understanding. By contrast, Tonio Andrade (2021) reconstructs the Dutch embassy to China of 1794–1795 to offer a nuanced account of the profound collision between the Qing tributary order and early modern European diplomatic ideals. He argues that the textual expectations upon which the envoys relied prior to departure often diverged sharply from their observations on the ground, and that it was within this gap that cultural superiority, linguistic differences, ritual protocols, and mutual misreadings intersected, shaping patterns of interaction and frameworks of understanding on both the Chinese and European sides. In comparison, Asian scholarship on linguistic exchange has tended to focus on translation practices between Chinese and English, particularly with the George Macartney mission to China as a central case. Such studies emphasize the crucial role of translation in diplomatic negotiations, seeking to reconstruct the linguistic contexts of diplomatic interaction at the time, as well as the ensuing challenges of understanding and the tensions inherent in processes of negotiation (Wang, 2022).

Beyond the aforementioned studies of linguistic contact involving Britain, the Netherlands, and China, Spain, as a major empire of the same period has likewise attracted growing scholarly attention. Drawing on previously

unpublished seventeenth-century manuscripts in which Spanish missionaries learned Hokkien, Fabio Yuchung Lee (2020) reconstructs the processes through which Spaniards acquired and used the language, while also illuminating the linguistic practices of Hokkien-speaking communities in the Philippines and their interactions with missionaries in the seventeenth century. These materials not only reveal the concrete settings of cross-linguistic interaction but also help to clarify how the Spanish Empire constructed knowledge of, and sought to understand, local societies within overseas colonial contexts, particularly in the Philippines.

More broadly, the process of language learning itself reflects patterns of cultural exchange and identity formation among different communities. In this context, Tom Hoogervorst's recent research on Chinese-language textbooks in the late colonial Dutch East Indies (2021) provides an important theoretical and methodological perspective for this study. Through an analysis of a range of textbooks written in Malay for Chinese learners of Chinese, he identifies their hybrid linguistic characteristics (Sino-Malay) and further demonstrates how these texts operated between discourses of Chinese nationalism and the structures of colonial social order. Hoogervorst treats such textbooks as a crucial window onto the cultural practices and social interactions of colonial Chinese communities, arguing that they were not merely instruments for language instruction, but also vehicles for transregional cultural exchange and the construction of ethnic consciousness. This perspective addresses a key limitation of earlier scholarship, which has tended to privilege phonological and lexical analysis while comparatively neglecting the broader socio-cultural contexts in which such materials were produced and used. As such, it offers particularly valuable insights for rethinking the functions and historical significance of these early language-learning texts.

3.0 Research Perspective and Sources: Language-Learning Texts of Overseas Chinese

Existing studies of language exchange and cultural contact have largely focused on diplomatic interactions between states or on missionary representations of local languages. By contrast, how overseas Chinese learned the languages of others, and how they re-positioned themselves through language in everyday life, has long lacked systematic examination. Earlier research has tended to privilege changes in phonology, grammar, or linguistic structure, while paying comparatively little attention to how language-learning texts themselves reflect concrete social contexts. Yet it is precisely at this level that a key point of entry for understanding the migrant experience of overseas Chinese can be found. Through such texts, it becomes possible not only to reconstruct processes of adaptation in unfamiliar environments, but also to trace, through patterns of lexical choice and semantic change, the modes of

interaction and knowledge systems that shaped relations between Chinese communities, local populations, and colonial authorities.

For this reason, a more comprehensive understanding of the lived world of nineteenth-century Chinese communities in Malaya requires a return to language-learning texts that were closest to everyday life, yet have often been overlooked. In the context of large-scale Chinese migration during this period, the Hakka and Cantonese dialect groups constituted a substantial proportion of the migrant population. Not only did their languages share a certain degree of similarity, but their occupational activities also partially overlapped, while their spheres of activity extended across the mining districts, ports, and markets of the Malay Peninsula, making them key forces in shaping local Chinese society. Consequently, the Malay–Chinese bilingual texts used by these dialect groups were not merely practical linguistic tools; they also serve as crucial windows through which to examine how migrants understood Malay society, constructed knowledge in unfamiliar environments, and interacted with local communities.

In terms of source materials, this article focuses on Malay language-learning texts dating from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries. The Hakka materials are drawn primarily from Zheng Ke Yin Yi Mu Lai You Hua (Malay–Chinese transliteration and explanation in Hakka), a text now held in Singapore and reproduced in the Collection of Miscellaneous Character Texts from Lingnan, Qing to Republic Era (Qing zhi Minguo Lingnan Zazi Wenxian Jikan) (Wang, 2018). As for the Cantonese materials, this study adopts Malay Language with Cantonese Phonetic Transcription and Explanation (Malayu Yue Yin Yi Yi) , a text preserved at the University of Singapore, as a comparative source (Feng, 1913) .Through a close analysis of these two texts, this article seeks to examine how Hakka and Cantonese migrants learned and employed Malay in diasporic settings, thereby reconstructing the processes through which linguistic knowledge was formed. It further explores variations and diachronic changes in language contact across different dialect groups, with the aim of re- examining the historical experiences and patterns of ethnic interaction among overseas Chinese in the Malay Peninsula.

Figure 1： Photograph showing the contents of Zheng Ke Yin Yi Mu Lai You Hua, Scource:Wang,2018.

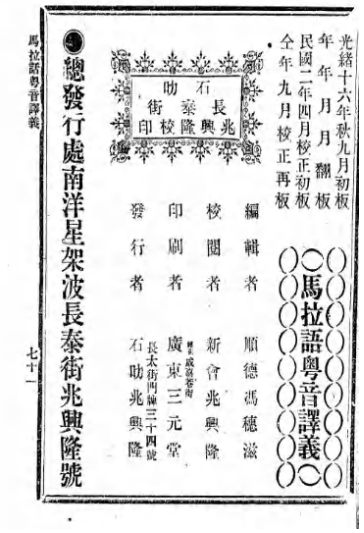

Figure 2： Photograph showing the contents of Malayu Yue Yin Yi Yi Scource:Feng,1913.

4.0 Linguistic Tools as Windows into Migrant Knowledge: The Hakka and Cantonese Malay-Learning Texts

This article examines Malay language learning booklets compiled by Cantonese- speaking and Hakka-speaking communities in the early twentieth century, with the aim of exploring how Chinese migrants learned and used Malay within the social context of colonial Malaya. Through an analysis of these teaching materials' content, organization, and practical contexts of use, the study investigates how language learning responded to the everyday and frequent demands of cross-ethnic interaction in colonial society, and how it functioned as an essential form of knowledge that enabled Chinese migrants to adapt to local conditions and to construct their daily social order.

The emergence of such Malay language learning books was closely related to the port-based social structure that developed in the Malay Peninsula from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. During this period, port cities such as Singapore attracted migrants from diverse linguistic and ethnic backgrounds, gradually shaping the Malay Peninsula into a highly multilingual social environment. Within this context, Malay became the most commonly used medium of interethnic communication, with Bazaar Malay in particular functioning as a crucial lingua franca. Bazaar Malay was a functionally oriented contact language based on Malay vocabulary, and it had been widely used since the establishment of British colonial rule in Singapore in. Although it had no native speakers, it long served as an important means of communication both among non-Malay groups and between Chinese communities and other ethnic populations (Khin, 2021).

It was precisely within this multilingual social environment that Chinese communities began to compile Malay language learning booklets designed for practical use. These booklets were typically small in format and easily portable, indicating that their primary purpose was to meet the immediate communicative needs of everyday trade, social interaction, and labor contexts. The textbook compiled by Hakka speakers was entitled Zheng Ke Yin Yi Yi Mu Lai You Hua, while the Cantonese counterpart was known as Malayu Yue Yin Yi Yi. Although the two texts were produced in different periods, both reflect how distinct dialect groups, operating within a multilingual colonial society, employed writing and translation practices to gradually construct practical knowledge of Malay and to navigate everyday life.

With regard to publication dates, Malayu Yue Yin Yi Yi was first printed in the sixteenth year of the Guangxu reign (1890). The edition used in this study is a reprint published in Singapore in the second year of the Republic of China (1913), indicating that both its compilation and circulation predate the Hakka bilingual glossary. By contrast, the extant Hakka version, Zheng Ke Yin Yi Yi Mu Lai You Hua, bears an imprint stating that it was printed in the ninth lunar month of the fifth year of the Republic of China (1916) printed by

lithography[2], suggesting a slightly later date of publication of Cantonese version. However, the compiler states in the preface that the text was written in Jiyou year. According to the sexagenary cycle, jiyou may correspond either to the twenty-ninth year of the Daoguang reign (1849) or to the first year of the Xuantong reign (1909), a dating that clearly does not align with the publication year of the extant edition, which is given as the fifth year of the Republic of China (1916). A closer examination of the physical features of the book reveals the imprint "lithographically printed at Shijing Hall, Shiba Fu, Guangzhou[3]" in the lower left corner of the page, indicating that the original place of printing was Guangzhou. Taken together, the chronological information provided in the preface and the imprint suggests that the first edition of Zheng Ke Yin Yi Yi Mu Lai You Hua was most likely completed in 1909, while the version dated 1916 should be understood as a later reprint produced in response to market demand in Southeast Asia.

It is also noteworthy that the Cantonese teaching manual examined in this study, Malayu Yue Yin Yi Yi, was likewise printed in Guangdong in its early editions. This indicates that from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, Guangdong was not only a major point of origin for Chinese migration but also an important center of publishing and knowledge production oriented toward overseas Chinese communities. Through lithographic printing and mechanisms of reprinting, language-learning materials compiled in Guangdong were able to transcend regional boundaries and circulate in Southeast Asian port cities such as Singapore. This phenomenon not only reflects the regional influence of Guangdong's publishing industry at the time but also underscores the growing practical demand for Malay language learning materials among Chinese communities in a multilingual colonial society, which in turn encouraged speakers of different dialect groups to engage increasingly with the learning and use of Bazaar Malay.

A closer examination of the table of contents of the Cantonese version shows that the text is organized into a total of twenty-eight categories, covering topics such as numbers, astronomy, commodities, medicinal materials, utensils, construction materials, the human body, and occupations, as well as lexical and syntactic units at different levels, including single-character, two-character, three-character items, and short and long sentences. Overall, the content focuses on practical vocabulary and basic sentence patterns, reflecting an arrangement clearly oriented toward the needs of everyday life. By contrast, the Hakka version is divided into thirty-one categories, noticeably exceeding the Cantonese version in terms of the number of classifications. However, a closer look at their classificatory approaches reveals several differences in the

[2] Original imprint reads: Zhonghua Minguo wu nian (1916) qiu jiuyue dianshi yin.
[3] Original imprint reads: Guangzhou Shiba Fu Shijing Tang shiyin.

emphasis aspects of daily life. The Cantonese version is in fact more detailed in certain everyday categories, for example by including additional sections on medicines, jewellery, bones and internal organs, and forms of address; at the same time, however, it lacks categories that had existed previously, such as those devoted to minerals and forms of address. The Hakka version, by contrast, introduces a greater number of categories related to sentence patterns and incorporates toponymic sections such as “Dutch administrative centers” and “Chinese provinces”. Although some of these geographical categories are no longer preserved in the extant copies, the overall classificatory design nonetheless demonstrates a clear editorial awareness of practical contexts of use and differentiated learning needs. These differences in the organization of the table of contents not only suggest that speakers of different dialect groups encountered distinct living conditions and linguistic demands within Malay society, but also provide important analytical clues for a comparative examination of the language-learning strategies and logics of knowledge organization adopted by Hakka and Cantonese migrants.

Examining the cultural networks in which the authors of the prefaces and the editors of these texts were embedded allows for a clearer understanding of the positions and symbolic meanings occupied by different dialect versions within the modern publishing field. The preface to Malayu Yue Yin Yi Yi was written by Pan Feisheng（潘飞声）, an intellectual active in southern China and overseas during the late Qing and early Republican periods. Pan spent an extended period residing in Europe, where he participated in teaching and scholarly exchanges related to Sinology. His transregional life experience afforded him first-hand exposure to issues of linguistic transmission and cultural contact, shaping a comparatively open intellectual outlook. After returning to China, Pan moved frequently between Guangzhou, Hong Kong, and Shanghai, engaging in newspaper editing and literary activities. He also became a member of the Nanshe (南社), indicating his active participation in the cultural and intellectual networks surrounding the 1911 Revolution. Particularly noteworthy is Pan’s close relationship with Qiu Shuyuan (邱菽园), a prominent newspaper figure in Singapore. When Qiu founded the Tian Nan Xin Bao (天南新报) in 1898, the paper widely published works by poets from various regions, including contributions by Pan Feisheng and other well-known figures. This publishing activity reflects the existence of a knowledge and print network that spanned southern China and the Nanyang region（Yao, 2013）. This evidence indicates that the publishing and cultural milieu in which Malayu Yue Yin Yi Yi was produced was closely connected to the newspaper networks and transregional literary circles of the Nanyang, rather than being that of an isolated language manual. functions not merely as a language-learning manual, but as a medium through which knowledge transmission and social cognition operated simultaneously, revealing its multiple roles in the lived experiences of migrants.

5.1 From Dietary Vocabulary to Processes of Localization among Hakka Migrants

In the Hakka version, food-related vocabulary is primarily concentrated in the "Food"category, offering a concrete illustration of how Hakka migrants understood the structure of everyday diet. As reflected in the textual content, the range of entries is notably broad, encompassing not only marine products such as salted fish and fresh fish, but also a wide variety of meats, including pork (isi babi), beef (isi lembu), mutton (isi kambing), and buffalo meat (isi kerbau), as well as poultry such as chicken (ayam), duck (itik), and goose (angsa). This breadth of coverage suggests that the compiler possessed a detailed awareness of local ecological conditions and patterns of animal husbandry.

With regard to staple foods, the text records a variety of grains and starchy food sources, including glutinous rice (beras pulut), white rice (beras putih), sago (sagu), and vermicelli (tepung halus). Among these, sago (sagu) was one of the most common staple foods in Southeast Asia and was widely distributed in regions such as the Moluccas (Maluku), the Philippines, particularly the Sulu Archipelago and Kalimantan. Derived primarily from the pith of the sago palm, sago belongs to a starch-based resource system developed in tropical environments, and stands in marked contrast to the rice-centered dietary structure traditionally associated with Chinese foodways(Charra, 2016). These lexical items indicate that, in the course of settling into local life, migrants gradually came to accept and make use of food resources distinctive to tropical environments. The presence of such food-related vocabulary suggests that Hakka migrants were not merely reproducing dietary patterns from their places of origin. Rather, through everyday living, they progressively adjusted their dietary structure in response to local ecological conditions and material resources. In addition, the text records a range of terms related to seasoning and cooking, including salt (garam), sugar (gula), ginger sugar (gula halia), white sugar (gula putih), vinegar (cuka), and soy sauce (kicap). These entries indicate that Hakka migrants were already able to employ a diverse array of seasonings in daily food preparation, gradually shaping a dietary profile attuned to local living conditions. Particularly noteworthy is the use of the term manisan. In Malay, this term broadly refers to various kinds of sweet foods or preserved fruits and does not correspond directly to the more narrowly defined concept of "candy" in modern Chinese. Its appearance thus reflects processes of semantic adjustment and reconfiguration in the course of linguistic translation. For newly arrived Hakka migrants in Southeast Asia, such sweet foods were likely not a common component of their original dietary repertoire. Consequently, in the processes of linguistic conversion and comprehension, these items were often understood and assimilated through the pre-existing concept of "sugar." This phenomenon indicates that linguistic adaptation is not a one-to-one correspondence, but rather a mediated process in

which familiar conceptual frameworks serve as intermediaries for extending and constructing understandings of new cultural objects.

Overall, the text includes a number of food items that did not originally belong to the South China dietary system, such as coconut-based products and sago, indicating that Hakka migrants gradually came into contact with and incorporated locally available natural resources in the course of their lives in Southeast Asia. The appearance of these terms reflects not only shifts in dietary structure but also reveals how migrant communities reinterpreted food and resources within a new environmental context. A closer examination of the food-related vocabulary further shows that the text simultaneously preserves dietary elements rooted in Chinese culinary traditions while incorporating a variety of local ingredients, thereby presenting a dietary pattern characterized by both continuity and adaptation. As Tan Chee Beng (2011) has pointed out, the formation of overseas Chinese food cultures in Southeast Asia is the result of continuous negotiation, adaptation, and integration between Chinese culinary traditions and local food practices. It also reflects the ways in which migrant communities reconstruct their lifestyles and cultural identities within new ecological and social environments.

Therefore, the dietary vocabulary presented in Zheng Ke Yin Yi Yi Mu Lai You Hua is not only significant at the linguistic level but may also be understood as a concrete illustration of how Hakka migrants engaged in processes of cultural adaptation and knowledge transformation within Southeast Asian societies. Through these terms, we are able to glimpse how Hakka migrants reinterpreted food, resources, and everyday life in an unfamiliar environment, and how they gradually shaped a form of dietary culture marked by local characteristics.

In addition, within the “Commodities” section, the text records a variety of seafood-related items, such as squid (ikan sotong), fish skin (kulit ikan), and fish maw (perut ikan). These entries indicate the significant influence of a port-centered trade economy on everyday dietary practices among Hakka communities in Malaya. At the same time, the text also includes several high-value commercial goods, including bird’s nest (sarang burung), shark fin (sisik ikan), and buffalo horn (tanduk kerbau), reflecting Hakka migrants’ awareness of trade commodities and market value. Furthermore, the text records a wide range of dried foods and preserved vegetables, such as glass noodles (laksa kering), preserved mustard greens (sayur kering), salted Chinese cabbage (sayur lobak masin), dried daylily buds (sayur bunga kering), and dried mushrooms (kulat kering). These entries point to the Hakka community’s strong reliance on preserved foods within a tropical environment. Taken together, such vocabulary not only depicts the dietary landscape of Hakka life in Southeast Asia but also illustrates how migrants absorbed and adjusted their inherited food practices in the course of localization, in order to adapt to the material conditions and everyday demands of a tropical

society.The text contains no vocabulary related to alcoholic beverages. By contrast, seventeenth-century language manuals produced in the Philippines frequently include terms such as arak, indicating the prevalence of alcohol consumption in everyday life in the Philippines (Lee, 2021).

In its question-and-answer format, the text includes a separate section entitled “Dialogues with the Cook” (Tong chufu wenda men), indicating that its content is not limited to one-to-one lexical correspondences but instead incorporates concrete interactional contexts. The dialogues collected in this section largely revolve around food and commercial transactions, such as “Prepare some food to eat tomorrow morning” (besok boleh bikin barang sikit makan), “The coffee has already sold out” (kopi sudah habis), and “Twenty cents” (dua puluh sen satu kati tuan). These examples reflect the practical linguistic demands generated by everyday activities surrounding food preparation and trade. Particularly noteworthy is the frequent appearance of the term Teuga (tuan) in these dialogues, as seen in expressions such as “What would you like to eat, sir?” (tuan mau makan barang apa) and “What kinds of fruit do you like, sir?” (tuan suka makan apa buah). This recurring form of address suggests that the speaker is often positioned in a role of inquiry or response, rather than command. Such linguistic situations not only illustrate patterns of language use within service relationships but also reflect the social positioning and division of roles within food-related settings in contemporary Chinese communities.

From this perspective, the pedagogical focus of the text lies not in abstract grammatical structures but in communicative scenarios that could be repeatedly deployed in everyday life—particularly those closely tied to food, commerce, and labor—thereby underscoring its function as a practical language-learning manual.

5.2 Daily Material Culture among Hakka Migrants as Reflected in Clothing-Related Vocabulary

In Zheng Ke Yin Yi Yi Mu Lai You Hua, references to clothing and dress do not constitute the largest portion of the text, yet they nevertheless offer valuable insight into how Chinese communities at the time understood and categorized everyday material culture. With regard to color, the text records only basic color terms—such as gray, red, blue, black, white, yellow, and green—suggesting that attention to color was primarily oriented toward practical considerations rather than decorative or symbolic meanings. In terms of clothing types, the items listed are largely those commonly encountered in daily life, including shirts (baju), trousers (seluar), skirts (sarung), hats (topi), belts (tali pinggang), undershirts (baju kemeja), and long robes (baju panjang). This selection reflects an editorial approach guided chiefly by practical usage

and daily needs. Notably, footwear occupies a relatively prominent position in the text, and its classification is comparatively detailed. In addition to general types of shoes, the text differentiates footwear according to materials and functions, such as slippers (kasut selipar) and cloth-patterned sandals (kain bunga kasut), indicating the influence of local living environments and mobility requirements on dress culture. Particularly illuminating is the treatment of the term ji (clogs), rendered as sepatu palem. Rather than directly mapping onto an established Chinese concept, this translation adopts a descriptive strategy, interpreting the item as footwear made from palm and other plant-based materials. Such a translation approach suggests that the compiler sought to explain objects originating from China through locally available natural resources, reflecting a strong reliance on local experience and everyday knowledge in the process of linguistic translation.

Overall, an analysis of clothing-related vocabulary shows that Zheng Ke Yin Yi Yi Mu Lai You Hua does not merely present simple lexical correspondences, but rather embodies a set of linguistic practices deeply embedded in lived experience. These practices reflect how migrants perceived their surrounding environment and engaged in concrete forms of cross-cultural interaction. Through such subtle yet tangible linguistic materials, we gain further insight into how Hakka migrants, within the everyday contexts of Nanyang society, gradually constructed their understanding of the material world through language.

5.3 Daily Consumption and daily Life under British Colonial Rule

Next, this article approaches the analysis from the perspective of "daily life" to examine how Zheng Ke Yin Yi Yi Mu Lai You Hua represents the daily living conditions of Chinese communities within Malay society at the time. More specifically, based on the lexical content reflected in the text, the discussion proceeds through the dimensions of "daily consumption," "production and labor," and "social structure," in order to elucidate how Hakka migrants responded to their living experiences and everyday needs in Malay society through linguistic practices. By examining these aspects, the study not only reveals how language functioned as a key medium for understanding everyday life, but also demonstrates its crucial role in shaping collective experience and social cognition.

From the nineteenth century onward, large numbers of Hakka migrants moved to the Malay Peninsula and gradually became involved in local economic activities centered on tin mining. Regions such as Selangor and Perak subsequently emerged as major tin-producing areas, and the Hakka community, in turn, became one of the principal labor forces in the mining industry (Khoo, 1991). This historical background is also clearly reflected in the content of the text. A number of terms related to mining activities appear throughout the

work, such as karang (“ore-bearing sand”), basuh karang (“washing ore sand”), lampan (“hill or surface ore sand”), and karang baik (“high-quality ore sand”). These terms indicate that the compiler possessed a considerable degree of knowledge regarding the properties of tin-bearing sand, methods of processing, and distinctions in quality. Together, they not only demonstrate a nuanced classification of different types of ore sand, but also reflect a familiarity with the mining process itself. The term lampan is particularly illustrative, as it refers to an open-air hydraulic mining method that was among the most commonly used techniques in tin mining during the period (King, 1940). The appearance of this term in the text indicates that the compiler possessed a concrete and clear understanding of actual mining operations.

This evidence indicates that Hakka migrants did not engage with Malay society solely at the level of language, but actively participated in mining production and, through the process of labor, gradually shaped their understanding of minerals, technologies, and the natural environment. The prominence of such terminology in the text reflects the role played by the Hakka community within the economic structure of Malay society at the time. Through the acquisition and use of this vocabulary, Hakka migrants were able to comprehend and adapt to their modes of labor and living conditions, with language thus serving as an important medium linking economic activity and social positioning.

As large numbers of Hakka migrants became engaged in labor-intensive industries such as tin mining, their ways of life increasingly became intertwined with the economic structures of the colonial Malay Peninsula. Under British colonial rule, the opium trade emerged as one of the officially tolerated and even institutionalized, economic activities, penetrating mining areas and labor communities alike. As a result, the circulation and consumption of opium constituted an integral component of both the labor system and the broader colonial economic structure of the period (Trocki, 1990). In this context, the text also contains a range of terms related to opium, such as “Luzon tobacco” (cerut), “prepared opium”, “opium smoke” (candu), and “raw opium”. The presence of these terms indicates that opium and related smoking products had already become clearly identifiable and nameable elements of everyday life. The inclusion of such vocabulary not only reflects the widespread presence of opium in contemporary society, but also suggests that it had long been incorporated into migrants’ lived experience as one of the commodities of daily consumption.

In addition to recording commodities and economic activities related to everyday needs, the text also includes a wide range of terms referring to social identities and occupational roles, thereby reflecting the concrete workings of society at the time. In the section titled “Human Occupations” , the book lists various identities and professions commonly encountered in Malay society, such

as “British” (orang Inggeris), “French” (orang Perancis), “Keling” (orang Keling), “missionary” (tuan paderi), and “datuk” (rendered as bosatu in the text), indicating the compiler’s awareness of the ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity characteristic of colonial society. The text further records a number of titles associated with administrative structures, including “Malay ruler” (raja), “King of Siam” (Raja Siam), “land surveyor” (tuan ukur tanah), “inspector” (inspektor), as well as the Chinese community leader known as the kapitan (甲必丹). Taken together, these terms relating to official positions and occupational roles complement the earlier vocabulary concerning food, material culture, and labor, collectively sketching a social landscape marked by the coexistence of multiple ethnic groups and hierarchical strata.

When Hakka migrants relocated to the unfamiliar environment of Nanyang, bodily health became an important concern alongside the adaptation to language and livelihood. As living conditions, labor regimes, and dietary structures changed, various illnesses and physical discomforts gradually became part of everyday experience. In addition to recording everyday objects and common expressions, Zheng Ke Yin Yi Yi Mu Lai You Hua also includes a number of terms related to ailments and bodily conditions. Prolonged labor, exposure to a hot and humid climate, and changes in diet and daily routines made illness an unavoidable aspect of migrant life.Terms found in the text—such as “bleeding” (keluar darah), “weak legs” (lembut kaki), “hot feet” (kaki panas), “heart illness” or emotional distress (sakit hati), “body heat” (badan hangat), “body coldness” (badan sejuk), and “toothache” (sakit gigi)—largely revolve around bodily discomfort caused by labor, physiological responses to climatic conditions, and the interplay between emotional states and physical well-being. This suggests that, for Hakka migrants of the period, illness was not an abstract medical concept but a form of practical knowledge closely embedded in everyday life.

Through the organization and analysis of such vocabulary, we may not only understand how Hakka migrants identified and described bodily conditions in the Nanyang environment, but also gain insight into how they gradually constructed a framework of knowledge about the body and illness through language under unfamiliar natural and social circumstances.

5.4 From “Mobility”-Related Vocabulary to the Migratory Experiences of Hakka Migrants

In the domain of “mobility”, the vocabulary recorded in Zheng Ke Yin Yi Yi Mu Lai You Hua provides a concrete depiction of the everyday practices of movement and transportation among Chinese migrants on the Malay Peninsula. The means of transport documented in the text include ox carts (kereta lembu), horse-drawn carts (kereta kuda), and the so-called “Eastern carriage” (kereta

angkong), referring to the rickshaw commonly used in the modern period. The designation of the latter may be etymologically related to Hokkien terms for certain implements or hand-pushed vehicles, indicating the circulation and transformation of transport-related vocabulary across different Sinitic dialects and Malay. This, in turn, reflects the hybrid character and processes of lexical formation associated with transportation in a multilingual contact environment (Lee, 1990).

This phenomenon indicates that the linguistic environment reflected in Zheng Ke Yin Yi Yi Mu Lai You Hua was situated in a historical phase of intensive interaction between Malay and various Chinese dialects, thereby highlighting the formation and practical use of Bazaar Malay as a lingua franca. As Hokkien often functioned as a key medium of communication among Chinese communities in major port cities of Southeast Asia at the time, traces of Hokkien influence can still be clearly identified in the lexical system of this text, even though it was primarily compiled for Hakka migrants. This, in turn, reflects the sharing, diffusion, and interweaving of linguistic resources within a multi-dialect contact environment (Khin, 2021).

6.0 Textual Analysis II：Cantonese Approaches to Learning Malay

The preceding section analyzed Malay–Hakka bilingual texts, using an examination of lexical organization and pragmatic usage to reconstruct the everyday life and cultural practices of Hakka migrants in Nanyang society. Building on this discussion, the following section shifts its focus to the Cantonese versions of comparable texts. Given the high degree of similarity between the two corpora in terms of overall lexical range and organizational structure, this study does not pursue a simple parallel comparison. Instead, it concentrates on the points of lexical divergence and differential emphasis found in the Cantonese materials relative to the Hakka texts, in order to explore how Cantonese migrants, operating within the same colonial social conditions, shaped distinctive life experiences and social positions through linguistic choice and lexical configuration.

Through a comparative analysis of domains such as food, clothing, dwelling, and mobility, this section aims to demonstrate how Cantonese migrants responded to the institutional structures and everyday demands of colonial society at the linguistic level. By attending to these subtle yet consequential differences, the analysis further seeks to construct a historically grounded understanding of Cantonese migrant society at the time, thereby deepening our comprehension of ethnic differentiation, interaction patterns, and mechanisms of cultural adaptation in a multilingual colonial context.

6.1 Culinary Knowledge in a Port Society: Food Choices and the Medicinal World of Cantonese Migrants

In Malayu Yue Yin Yi Yi, compiled by Cantonese speakers, entries related to food display a high degree of similarity to the Hakka version in terms of overall structure and lexical arrangement. This consistency is likely attributable to the continued use of an established editorial template during the processes of printing and compilation, such that most lexical items correspond closely between the Cantonese and Hakka versions, even to the extent that their ordering is largely identical. Nevertheless, despite this highly standardized framework, a number of noteworthy differences can still be discerned. These differences indicate that Cantonese compilers and users of such Malay learning texts did not merely replicate an existing model wholesale, but instead incorporated, to a certain extent, their own dietary experiences in the Nanyang context. At the same time, these variations reflect distinctions in everyday food practices and material orientations among different Chinese dialect groups.

With regard to the elements shared by both texts, the Cantonese and Hakka versions alike include preserved mustard greens (sayur kering), white rice (beras putih), glutinous rice (beras pulut), sago (sagu), pork (isi babi), chicken (ayam), and coconut oil (minyak kelapa). This common set of food items indicates that these dietary elements had become relatively stable and widely shared components of everyday food consumption among Chinese migrants in Southeast Asia at the time. Such convergence not only reflects the gradual formation of a shared dietary foundation within migrant communities in a new environment, but also suggests that certain aspects of food practices transcended dialect-group boundaries and were transformed into cross-communal lived experiences. Nevertheless, a closer examination of the texts reveals that Cantonese migrants placed different emphases in their choice of foods and ingredients. These distinctions constitute a dietary profile that sets them apart from their Hakka counterparts and provide important clues for understanding how different dialect groups articulated their everyday life experiences within Southeast Asian societies.

First, in terms of the range of ingredients presented, the Cantonese text clearly includes a wider variety of food items than the Hakka version. Entries such as ham and fermented shrimp (udang jeruk) appear in the text. Among these, ham occupies a particularly important place within the Cantonese culinary system and is used in a wide range of dishes. A representative example is the classic Cantonese superior stock, whose flavor base relies heavily on the salty and umami notes provided by ham, reflecting the Cantonese emphasis on techniques of curing and fermentation (Zhao, 2023). By contrast, Hakka cuisine tends to place greater emphasis on the practicality of ingredients and

their capacity to provide sustenance. The differences in dietary structure and culinary philosophy between the two thus form a clear contrast.

Within the category of fruits and vegetables, the Cantonese text also includes several items that differ from those found in the Hakka dietary repertoire, such as betel nut (pinang) and jambu. Among these, betel nut may be regarded as one of the earlier loanwords to have entered the Chinese lexicon from the Malay linguistic sphere, with a circulation history dating back at least to the Ming–Qing period, by which time it had already become widespread in Guangdong. Historical sources indicate that during this period the customs offices of Quanzhou and Guangzhou were able to derive substantial annual revenue from the betel nut trade, demonstrating that betel nut was not merely an item of everyday consumption but also an important commercial commodity linking Southeast Asia and Guangdong. This, in turn, reflects the distinctive position it occupied within the social and economic structures of Guangdong society (Salmon, 2009). As for jambu, now commonly known as guava, its name derives from the distinctive odor emitted by the fruit when ripe. Originally native to the Americas, the species was later introduced into Asia by the Spanish and, by the Qing period, had become widely cultivated and consumed in Guangdong. It was even at times mistakenly regarded as indigenous to China, indicating that jambu had by then become highly localized within Cantonese society (Peng, 2023).

From another perspective, the Cantonese text introduces a separate category of "medicinal materials," a classification that does not appear in the Hakka version. The terms listed under this category include rhinoceros horn, star anise, pepper, cardamom, and musk, indicating the distinctive position of Guangdong within networks of medicinal knowledge and the circulation of medical resources. Since the nineteenth century, Guangzhou, as one of China's most important treaty ports, has served not only as a hub of Sino-Western trade but also as a key site for the exchange of medical knowledge. Benjamin Hobson, a British missionary of the London Missionary Society, practiced medicine and published extensively in Guangzhou. In his Xiyi Luelun, he repeatedly referred to the practical use of Chinese medicinal materials, reflecting the high capacity of Guangzhou society at the time to absorb and transform medical knowledge (Liu, 2023). Among the various entries on medicinal materials, camphor is particularly representative. In addition to its use in Chinese medicine (Liu, 2023:57), by the mid-nineteenth century, camphor was also widely used in industrial and military contexts and gradually became one of the important export commodities, with its production and circulation largely concentrated in the Guangzhou region (Chu, 2014). This context may help explain why terms related to camphor appear only in Cantonese language-learning texts and are absent from the Hakka version.

Overall, as a long-standing treaty port, Guangzhou's social environment was consistently exposed to, and actively absorbed, material goods and knowledge systems from overseas. This historical condition meant that although the overall structure of the Cantonese version of the text largely resembles that of the Hakka version, it nonetheless exhibits several regionally specific differences in content. The inclusion of foreign fruits such as pinang (betel nut) and jambu (guava), for example, reflects Guangdong's earlier and deeper integration into Southeast Asian networks of commodity circulation. Moreover, with the arrival of missionaries and Western medical knowledge, related medicinal materials and commercial products gradually became part of everyday knowledge in Cantonese society, prompting the text to introduce a distinct category of "medicinal materials." This phenomenon demonstrates that geographical position and historical experience of trade not only shaped material culture but also influenced the classification and presentation of knowledge in language-learning texts, thereby enabling Cantonese communities in Southeast Asian societies to articulate cultural understandings and interpretive frameworks distinct from those of Hakka groups.

6.2 Dress and bodily adornment in the Cantonese text

In Malayu Yue Yin Yi Yi, terms related to dress and bodily adornment, although less extensive in overall coverage than those concerning food or everyday necessities, nonetheless provide an important entry point for understanding how Cantonese migrants shaped socially recognizable and intelligible positions through practices of clothing and bodily decoration in Malay societies. In comparison with the Hakka version, the Cantonese text presents a more fine-grained classification at the level of "clothing," most notably through the establishment of a separate category for "ornaments," revealing differences between the two traditions in both the degree of attention paid to dress and bodily adornment and their respective classificatory approaches.

Under the category of "clothing," the text primarily records practical garments such as skirts (sarung), shirts (baju), and cloth (kain), with a clear emphasis on items used in daily life. The category of "colors," by contrast, lists only basic color terms, such as red, black, blue, and white—indicating a functional focus on basic identification and practical needs, and thus reflecting the everyday requirements of Cantonese migrants. The most striking difference in the Cantonese text, however, lies in the establishment of a distinct category titled "ornaments." This category is absent from the Hakka version but is treated as an independent and substantial section in Malayu Yue Yin Yi Yi. Its contents are wide-ranging, encompassing pearls, silverware, crystal, gemstones, as well as bodily accessories such as earrings (subang) and necklaces (rantai). In addition, the text includes small, daily items such as toothpicks and needle tips, indicating that the scope of the "ornaments" category is not limited to

expensive or luxurious objects but instead encompasses a broad range of personal accessories and bodily adornments used in daily life.

The appearance of this category suggests that Cantonese compilers did not conceptualize "clothing" solely in terms of garments themselves, but rather incorporated a broader set of related objects associated with wearing and bodily presentation that were practically employed in everyday contexts. Such items were often closely tied to gender, social status, occasions of use, and interpersonal interaction, and were therefore more likely to be mentioned, requested, or discussed in daily encounters, making them objects that required clear naming and systematic learning. This phenomenon not only points to the relative complexity and diversity of material life in Cantonese society, but also reflects the visibility and practical significance of items associated with women in everyday practices, which in turn justified their inclusion in language-learning texts. By contrast, the absence of a comparable "ornaments" category in the Hakka text may be understood in light of a migratory experience and lifestyle more heavily oriented toward labor, subsistence, and basic living needs, rendering more decorative or symbolic objects less central to the linguistic concerns of Hakka communities at the time.

Overall, through categories such as "clothing," "colors," and "ornaments," the Cantonese Malay–Chinese bilingual text presents a mode of daily life understanding centered on the body and outward appearance. This demonstrates that language not only serves to denote objects, but also reflects the ways in which Cantonese migrants in Malay societies constructed material life and popular culture through everyday practices.

6.3 Daily circulation of Commodity Circulation, Material Use, and Social Roles

In the following discussion, this article approaches the issue from the level of everyday life, arguing that the vocabulary presented in the text is closely tied to the daily experiences of migrants at the time and can be read as an important set of clues for understanding the lived environments encountered by Cantonese migrants after entering Malay society. By examining these lexical items, it becomes possible to further illustrate how Cantonese migrants, through language learning, acquired the basic knowledge necessary to sustain everyday activities in Southeast Asian society and gradually constructed their understanding of the local lifeworld.

To begin with, within the category of "commodities," the text includes a range of terms related to trade, processing, and raw materials—such as dried oyster, fennel, rattan, and vine materials, reflecting a clear concern with commodity circulation and sources of material goods. Among these commodity-related terms, those most distinctive of the Cantonese context are canned tobacco and tortoiseshell (hawksbill turtle). Tobacco-related vocabulary is particularly

noteworthy, as the forms in which tobacco appears in the Cantonese text differ markedly from those found in the Hakka version. Tobacco has long maintained a close association with Chinese capital, a connection that was particularly pronounced in Southeast Asia. As early as the beginning of the twentieth century, Nanyang tobacco enterprises were already competing with British and American tobacco companies, and several of the most prominent Nanyang tobacco firms were themselves founded by Cantonese entrepreneurs. This underscores the deep and sustained ties between Cantonese communities and the tobacco industry. Prior to 1909, the development of Nanyang tobacco was primarily centered on Guangzhou, Hong Kong, and Shanghai; after 1909, however, its sales networks and marketing channels gradually expanded into Southeast Asia, with particular emphasis on Singapore and Siam (Chong, 2019). This trajectory of development indicates that tobacco had long been a highly familiar commodity for Cantonese communities, and this familiarity likewise extended to Cantonese migrants who later moved into the Malayan region.

If tobacco reflects the Cantonese community's long-term engagement with modern light industry and consumer markets, then hawksbill turtle shell (hawksbill turtle) points to a different commodity world—one closely tied to marine resources, artisanal production, and the circulation of luxury goods. According to historical records, as early as the Han dynasty, Chinese merchants from the Guangdong region were already involved in the trade of hawksbill turtle shell (Chu, 2015). By the Ming dynasty, within the tributary trade system, the term "hawksbill turtle shell" (daimao) was already included in both the Ryukyu Interpreter Vocabulary (Liuqiu guan yiyu) and the Japanese Interpreter Vocabulary (Riben guan yiyu). So-called yiyu ("interpreter vocabularies") were bilingual or multilingual glossaries officially compiled for the purposes of managing foreign relations, trade, and tributary affairs; the items they recorded were typically those that appeared frequently in actual diplomatic and commercial exchanges and that possessed institutional significance. The inclusion of hawksbill turtle shell in such yiyu texts thus reflects its important position within China's external trade and commodity exchange system at the time(Lin, 2019).

In other respects, a comparison with the Hakka version further reveals that although certain items in the two texts refer to similar objects, the actual entries included differ in emphasis. For example, the Cantonese text records dried oyster (haogu), whereas the Hakka version primarily lists oyster sauce (guyou). Both are related to the processing of marine products, yet one foregrounds the dried commodity itself while the other highlights its derivative processed product. This contrast reflects differences in everyday usage and trading practices among distinct dialect groups. Such variations suggest that even when confronted with similar natural resources, different communities may develop divergent systems of classification and naming based on their

practical modes of use and everyday needs, thereby shaping distinct material understandings within the lived contexts of the Malay Peninsula.

Overall, in its treatment of the "life" domain, Malayu Yue Yin Yi Yi organizes knowledge through categories such as goods, implements, and human occupations, forming a knowledge structure closely aligned with everyday practice. These lexical items not only respond to the concrete needs of migrants in Southeast Asian society, but also demonstrate that language learning here was not an abstract exercise. Rather, it functioned as a practical tool that enabled individuals to comprehend, navigate, and gradually integrate into their surrounding environment. Through such vocabulary closely tied to daily life, Cantonese migrants were able to progressively construct a basic understanding of the material environment and social relations of Malay society.

6.4 Movement: Linguistic Practices from Transoceanic Mobility to Spatial Positioning

In Malayu Yue Yin Yi Yi, the category of movement does not refer merely to physical motion. Rather, it constitutes a composite domain encompassing transoceanic navigation, settlement upon arrival, and the comprehension of spatial order. Relevant vocabulary is primarily distributed across categories such as "shipboard implements," "housing," and "building materials," together forming a coherent trajectory that traces the Cantonese migrant experience from departure, to arrival in Southeast Asia, and onward to the gradual entry into and understanding of local social space. Through the way these lexical items are arranged within the text, we can observe how Cantonese migrants, in the process of language learning, progressively constructed their cognitive maps of Southeast Asian space and situated themselves within it.

First, within the category of "Shipboard Implements," the text records a number of terms directly related to maritime activities, such as huochuan (kapal api, steamship), Tang ships (Chinese junks), and rudder (kemudi), indicating that Cantonese migrants possessed practical experience of seafaring in their daily lives. In particular, the juxtaposition of Tang ships and steamships reflects the coexistence of different maritime technologies within the Chinese migrant experience, and further reveals the interweaving of old and new technologies in the maritime environment of Southeast Asia from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. The so-called Tang ship refers to a Chinese-style sailing vessel, long used as a merchant ship for transporting goods and commodities, and serving as a key vehicle for Chinese transoceanic mobility and regional trade. In the early period, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) conducted trade voyages between Nagasaki and Batavia (present-day Jakarta) via Chinese junks, making these vessels an important ship type linking East Asian and Southeast Asian trading networks, and facilitating the

expansion of Chinese commercial activities throughout the Nanyang region (Cheng, 2018). The term huochuan (fire ship), meanwhile, reflects the process through which modern maritime technologies entered the Chinese lexical system and were gradually understood and assimilated. Research indicates that terms such as huochuan and huolunchuan (fire wheel ship) first appeared around 1838 and were primarily used to denote steamships. For late Qing society, the significance of such naming lay not merely in identifying a previously unknown object, but in the effort to incorporate it into an existing Chinese framework of expression and cognition. The designation huolunchuan was derived from the visual resemblance of steamships to traditional Chinese paddle-wheel vessels, while the term huochuan had already appeared in historical records prior to Sino-Western military conflicts and was subsequently extended to encompass the concept of the steamship. As understanding of Western maritime technology deepened, people gradually came to recognize that the propulsion of these vessels did not originate from "fire" itself, but from steam power. Correspondingly, the terminology evolved, revealing the dynamic interaction between linguistic change and technological knowledge in the process of intellectual adaptation (Lin, 2015).

From this perspective, the category of "shipboard equipment" does not merely present the names of means of transport, but rather constitutes a coherent body of knowledge concerning cross-sea mobility. For Cantonese migrants, maritime travel represented the crucial first step in "entering the Nanyang," and the risks, technologies, and bodily experiences involved in this process therefore needed to be clearly named and incorporated into language learning. This, in turn, reflects how migrants conceptualized and systematically constructed knowledge about transoceanic movement.

Among the spatially related vocabulary, the inclusion of printing house (yinziguan) in the category of "building materials" is particularly noteworthy. This term indicates that Cantonese migrants were no longer concerned solely with spaces of residence and movement, but were increasingly encountering new types of sites associated with knowledge production and the circulation of written texts. From the nineteenth century onward, as Western missionaries entered treaty ports such as Guangzhou, modern printing technologies were introduced into China. Printing houses thus became key sites for the production of religious texts, translated works, and new forms of knowledge (Wang, 2007).

In sum, the appearance of "printing house" in Cantonese language-learning texts is not incidental; rather, it indicates that spaces tied to textual production and knowledge circulation had entered the lived world of Cantonese migrants as recognizable and practically meaningful sites.

7.0 Conclusion

This article compares two Malay-language learning texts produced by migrants from different Chinese dialect groups—Zheng Ke Yin Yi Mu Lai You Hua and Malayu Yue Yin Yi—to argue that language textbooks should not be understood merely as passive by-products of migrants' adaptation to local society. Rather, they functioned as crucial gateways of knowledge through which migrants came to understand unfamiliar environments, enter the Nanyang world, and gradually learn how to act and live within it. Through close analysis of lexical choices, classificatory structures, and everyday thematic domains, this study demonstrates that even within the shared context of colonial Malaya, different dialect groups constructed distinct systems of linguistic knowledge. These differences did not arise simply from linguistic structures themselves, but were deeply rooted in migrants' respective social positions, economic networks, and everyday material experiences.

In contrast to the Hakka version, whose knowledge configuration centers on labor, subsistence, and bodily experience, the Cantonese text Malayu Yue Yin Yi displays a markedly stronger port-city and commercial orientation. As a long-standing hub of both domestic and international trade, Guangzhou had earlier and more frequent exposure to overseas commodities, technologies, and forms of knowledge. These historical experiences were directly sedimented in the structure and content of the language-learning text. Whether in its detailed recording of medicinal materials, ornaments, and commodity circulation, or in its clear classification of maritime transport and public spaces, the Cantonese text presents a framework of everyday understanding closely aligned with interregional trade, commercial exchange, and the circulation of knowledge.

Crucially, these differences do not remain at the level of abstract knowledge, but are concretely embedded in ways of perceiving, understanding, and naming the material world. The Cantonese text's emphasis on medicinal substances, rare commodities, and decorative goods reflects the lived experience of Cantonese migrants long embedded in commercial and trading networks. It also reveals that language here was not merely a tool for referring to objects, but a practical means of organizing experience, classifying the world, and engaging with newly encountered systems of knowledge.

This article therefore argues that such language-learning texts should be treated as key sources for understanding migrants' processes of knowledge construction. Through acts of naming and classification, these texts preserved not only linguistic equivalences, but also the pathways through which migrants understood society, positioned themselves within it, and made sense of their surroundings. The differences between the Cantonese and Hakka texts illuminate how migrants' economic roles and commercial positions in colonial Malaya profoundly shaped their perceptions of the material environment and their sense of social location.

In sum, Malay-language learning texts compiled by different dialect groups were closely intertwined with the economic activities and everyday lives of their users. This relationship directly permeated the internal structure of the texts, making language a vital medium through which we can re-enter historical societies and examine how knowledge was generated. By closely reading these seemingly modest booklets, we gain a more intimate view of how overseas Chinese migrants learned their way into the unfamiliar world of the Nanyang through language, and how, through lived experience, they developed distinct systems of linguistic knowledge and world-making. This perspective not only deepens our understanding of internal diversity within Chinese communities in colonial Malaya, but also offers a promising avenue for future research at the intersection of language, material culture, and migration history.

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