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Hakka: The Politics of Global  
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4. International Politics and Culture

## **Hakka: The Politics of Global Ethnic Identity Building**

Flemming Christiansen

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The Hakkas form a large ethnic group among the Chinese. Low estimates claim that there are 30 million Hakkas in the world, high estimates 40 million. The Hakkas have been the object of more than 100 years of ethnographic, ethnological, dialectological, anthropological, sociological and social-anthropological research, to the degree that a specialised Chinese branch of scholarship called Hakkaology (in Chinese 'Kejiaxue') has mapped them out in astonishing detail. Their migrations, speech forms, burial and marriage rites, their dwellings, their folklore and myths, their cuisine, lineages, settlement patterns, music, nursery rhymes and other vital data have been recorded and debated in impressive abundance. They have been the object of ethno-mythical glorification as 'pure-blooded' Chinese, yet separate from other Chinese (Wang Dong 1996, 30-31; Constable 1994, 78-79). Their men of literature stand out by force of the 'depth of their Hakka tradition' (Huang Qiufang 1993, 56). They were the leaders and the backbone of most uprisings and revolutions since the Taiping Rebellion (1850 - 1864), including the revolutionary movements that brought the Chinese Communist Party to power in 1949 (Erbaugh 1992; Wang Qingcheng 1992 and 1994; Zhang Xinghan 1994). They provided an impressive pantheon of leaders, including Deng Xiaoping, Singapore's senior minister Lee Kwan Yew, Taiwan's president Lee Teng-hui and former president of the Philippines Corazon Aquino; China's first president Sun Yat-sen was of Hakka descent like his wife Song Qingling and her sister Song Meiling (married to Chiang Kai-shek); the revolutionary luminaries also

include Zhu De, Chen Yi, Ye Jianying, Hu Yaobang and Wang Zhen.<sup>1</sup> Mao Zedong is by some considered a descendant of a Hakka lineage.<sup>2</sup> The veracity of these claims needs not concern us, but the fact that they are made calls our attention to the deliberate and highly politicised construction of Hakka identification. In the words of president Wong Shek-wa [Huang Shihua] of the Hong Kong Tsung Tsin Association (Xianggang Chongzheng Zonghui), 'China's modern history is the history created by the Hakkas' (Huang Shihua 1994, iv).

This paper examines the politics surrounding Hakka identity: The political and administrative doctrines of the Mainland and the shifting political structures in Taiwan are important ramifications for the development of Hakka identity. They are interdependent spheres of discourse: Political developments in Taiwan and Hong Kong influence the Mainland and vice versa. Hakka intellectuals and activists seek to influence the perception of the Hakkas by exerting influence in these contexts.

The discussion in this paper will first outline the basic issues of Hakka identity by presenting how it grew culturally and politically. It will then discuss how Hakka identity became a nationalist project with an organised core. It will discuss the dilemmas of the People's Republic in dealing with the Hakkas, examine the Hakka cause on Taiwan, the Hakka revival in Hong Kong, and the construction of a global Hakka identity.

### Who are Hakkas?

The Hakkas form one of the seven major dialect groups in China.<sup>3</sup> They are widely dispersed in southern parts of China, reflecting a gradual migration from the Central Plain (Zhongyuan) around Loyang in Henan towards the south, beginning somewhere between the third and eighth centuries A.D. The main path of migration was through southern

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<sup>1</sup> Erbaugh (1992) and Huang Shihua (1994). Sun Yat-sen's Hakka origins are widely cited (Hu Shengwu and Dai Angang 1992; Qiu Quanzheng 1994). Huang Kailu (1992, 371) suggests that Cory Aquino an assimilated Chinese whose ancestors are generally known to originate in southern Fujian, was Hakka.

<sup>2</sup> The possible Hakka ancestry of Mao Zedong is stated in 'Mao Zedong de yuanzu ye shi kejiaren' (Mao Zedong's Distant Ancestors are also Hakkas', *Yingguo Chongzheng Zhenbao*, no. 1 (8. August 1997), p. 3., cf. <http://ubik.virtual-pc.com/sapienti/mao.htm> [as viewed 27. August 1998]. The article (anonymous, but attributed to Wang Guanqiu, a prolific *con amore* writer about Hakkas in British overseas Chinese publications) infers Mao's Hakka origin from one sentence in *Shaoshan Mao Zedong zupu* (Lineage Records of Mao Zedong in Shaoshan) printed in 1941 and recently discovered by staff at the National Library in Beijing. See also remarks by Huang Shihua (1994, ix).

<sup>3</sup> Besides North Chinese, Cantonese (Yue), Shanghainese (Wu), Hokkien (Minnanhua), Hunanese (Xiang), and Jiangxi (Gan).

Henan, Anhui, Jiangxi, Hunan, and Fujian, towards northern Guangdong, through to Guangxi and Hainan. A substantial migration also took place to Taiwan, and through Hunan to Sichuan. Large-scale international migration took place, mainly in the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> In the 1930s, Hakka settlements were found in Jiangxi and Hunan border areas, Fujian, Guangdong, Guangxi, Hainan, Sichuan and Taiwan. At that time the densest Hakka population was found in two dozen or so counties in the border region between Jiangxi, Guangdong and Fujian. Mei County was seen as the core settlement of Hakkas.

The Hakkas are defined in terms of a separate speech and do have some specific cultural traits, but they are considered to be part of the Chinese Han majority. They are *not* one of the 56 officially designated national minorities (*shiaoshu minzu*) of China. The Hakkas are not considered a nationality (*minzu*), race, people, nation or tribe, but are occasionally referred to as a 'line of descent' (*minxi*), to furnish a sufficiently opaque categorisation.<sup>5</sup>

The Hakkas migrated to the south later than other groups, so that they were always forced to occupy marginal land. They were reluctant to assimilate and to a higher degree than other groups maintained their own cultural characteristics.

## THE RISE OF HAKKA IDENTITY

Leong (1985) examined how the Hakkas in South China emerged as an ethnic group; he claims that their separate cultural traits evolved in an environment of competition for resources.<sup>6</sup> Their settlement pattern, for example, 'stemmed from the fact that the land available to the Hakka immigrants was generally limited to the marginal type, not yet in use but already claimed by the Cantonese. Initially, the relationship was symbiotic: Hakkas worked the land in permanent tenure and the Cantonese collected ground rent' (Leong 1985, 298). The social and material difference between the earlier settlers, the Cantonese

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<sup>4</sup> The most substantial development of Hakka migration took place after 1842. Indentured labourers went to destinations in Southeast Asia, Peru, Cuba, Surinam, Transvaal, and similar places to work in mines and plantations.

<sup>5</sup> The term 'minxi' was invented by Luo Xianglin 'to explain various sub-branches within a nation' (Luo Xianglin 1933, 24). Luo in some of his English writings used the word 'tribe' casually to convey a similar meaning; however, the connotations of 'tribe' (savagery and evolutionary backwardness) make it unsuitable as a translation of 'minxi'.

<sup>6</sup> See also Cohen (1968) for a detailed analysis of how dialect, competition for land resources, migration, and state intervention in combination furthered the development of the Hakka identity.

speaking Punti,<sup>7</sup> and the later settlers, the Hakkas, became the focal point of social conflict, that translated into 'symbolic articulation of Hakka identity' (Leong 1985, 301).

During the seventeenth century, the Chinese authorities decided to depopulate a 25-kilometre deep swathe of land along the coast to prevent piracy and smuggling linked to insurgency against the Manchu empire. At the end of the eighteenth century, the authorities began to re-populate this land with paupers from overpopulated regions and people who had been hit by natural disasters, most of them Hakkas. This led to animosities between the evicted Cantonese-speaking Puntis and the Hakkas.<sup>8</sup>

Hakka as an ethnic label gradually gained currency in the nineteenth century, and became increasingly linked with the core settlement area of the Hakka in Jiaying (also called Mei) county. The Hakka 'ethos' was, among other things, expressed in the success of Jiaying to produce successful candidates for imperial examinations. The Hakkas of south China and other places increasingly looked to Jiaying for 'vindication from calumny'.<sup>9</sup> The first known systematic formulation of Hakka ethnocentric ideas was made in 1808 by Xu Xuzeng. Leong (1985, 302) characterised it as 'a statement of all the essential elements of Hakka self-identification, of the claim to Chineseness that was equal, if not superior, to that of other Chinese'.

Feuds between Puntis and Hakkas in parts of Guangdong went out of hand and set off a war between the two groups, lasting for more than a decade in the 1850s, and not ending until the 1860s. These events gave rise to strong intellectual manifestations on both sides of the ethnic divide, especially in local histories compiled between the 1860s and the 1920s. To judge by Leong's (1985, 306-307) summary, the Cantonese-speaking Puntis were more concerned with derogatory and hateful statements about the Hakkas, while the Hakkas engaged in a construction of the Hakka ethos as positive, *Chinese*, values, and of the Hakka dialect as rooted in northern speech forms. The controversy unfolded in the climate of growing Han-Chinese nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

A history book on Guangdong for the new curriculum of modern schools set up around 1905 contained a sentence stating, 'among the races of Guangdong are Hakkas and

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<sup>7</sup> Punti (bendi) is often juxtaposed Hakka (kejia). The etymology of the two names is 'autochtone' (bendi meaning 'of local origin') and 'allochtone' (kejia meaning 'guest people'). In historical records of the Qing dynasty, the usage is 'zhu' (host) and 'ke' (guest). The name of the Hakkas thus is a direct reference to conflicts over resources between earlier and later migrants with different speech forms and forms of social organisation.

<sup>8</sup> For further discussion, see Christiansen (1998, 6-10).

<sup>9</sup> The American Baptist missionary George Campbell, cited in Leong (1985, 302).

Hoklos,<sup>10</sup> they are not Cantonese and are not of the Han racial stock' (Leong 1985, 308). The ensuing controversy forced the educational authorities to cut out the offending sentence, and, more importantly, set in motion a rallying of Hakka scholars to prove the pure Han-Chinese racial origins of the Hakka. Some of the most fervent supporters of the nationalist cause, including prominent members of Sun Yat-sen's United League (Tongmenghui, established in 1906 and the precursor of the Nationalist Party), supported the Hakka cause in publications that were never seen as antithetical to the unifying nationalism of Sun Yat-sen (Leong 1985, 308-309).

Punti resentment and prejudice, however, did not subside for several decades. A repetition of the textbook scandal occurred in 1920 when a foreign school teacher in Suzhou, R. D. Wolcott, published a geography textbook in English stating that the Hakkas were a wild and backward tribe. This led to the establishment in 1921 of Hakka organisations in several Chinese cities, and of the Tsung Tsin Association (Chongzheng Zonghui) in Hong Kong. Many Hakka intellectuals, however, were opposed to the establishment of special Hakka associations, claiming that they were retrogressive and parochial. Only the Tsung Tsin Association in Hong Kong continued after 1921 (Leong 1985, 311-312).

The persisting animosity towards Hakkas permeated the political system in southern China. When the republican government had moved from Guangzhou to Nanjing in 1927, the military and civil command in south China perhaps more by accident than by design fell into the hands of Hakka militarists and politicians, who fought between themselves (Leong 1985, 313-316). This did silence public expressions of anti-Hakka feelings, but not the resentment among Cantonese elites.

The nationalists under Sun Yat-sen, and later Chiang Kai-shek, were not able to solve the Hakka-Punti enmity which continued to smother for decades. However, the relative social disadvantage of the Hakkas virtually disappeared during the early twentieth century, as they developed both in social status and in economic terms. At the same time, the higher social status of the Cantonese-speaking Puntis was challenged by the growing nationalism. The enormous spread of literacy in the modern vernacular during the 1920s was particularly important: The written language was based on Mandarin, and so was equidistant to the two dialects. Similarly, in the 1920s Sun Yat-sen's republican government in Guangzhou promoted Mandarin as the spoken 'national language' (guoyu), thus creating a status language above Cantonese. Careers, cultural status, and participation in the nationalising

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<sup>10</sup> Hoklo (fulao) is a term used to denote speakers of the Hokkien dialect (Minnanhua) in the southern Fujian province and of the closely related Teochiu (Chaozhou) dialect in northern Guangdong.

project increasingly depended upon the knowledge of Mandarin, thus glossing the Cantonese-speaking elites with a tinge of parochialism.

The Hakka elites' ability to partake in the modernising project, and their economic and social success in the first decades of the twentieth century created a demand for a myth of Hakka origin. The departure from the village environment experienced by the modern intellectual, political and economic Hakka elites allowed for adopting cosmopolitan tastes and abandoning rural ways and local dialect. A sentimental myth of rags-to-riches and superior original moral qualities like frugality, puritanism and tenacity could bring a mellowing flavour to their new-found cosmopolitanism. For most of these intellectuals and modernisers, however, Hakka activism and polemics were retrograde, a reflection of the past they were determined to leave behind them. For other layers of the population, nothing much changed: In the villages and among the rank-and-file of the large armies the strife between Hakkas and Puntis remained deep and intractable.

The assertion of Hakka identity as something separate and special, paradoxically, grew out of middle class Hakkas' claim to be part of the global Han Chinese identity.

## FUSING ETHNIC SCIENCE WITH POLITICAL ORGANISATION

It took the intervention of a scholar and ethnic politician to craft a coherent body of scientific evidence in support of the thesis that the Hakkas were Han Chinese, around which a sustained ethnic consciousness arose. The work of Luo Xianglin<sup>11</sup> rendered the cause of the Hakkas respectable and convincing. A polymath, he set out to collect all the evidence he could, applying to it the most rigorous and advanced scientific methods of the time, ranging from archival research of lineage documents over linguistics, to the examination of biological heredity. He elevated what had been uninformed *guerres de plume* into the realm of dispassionate scientific debates. After a number of smaller publications, his *Kejia yanjiu daolun* (whose English title on the original title page was: *An Introduction to the Study of the Hakkas in Its Ethnic, Historical and Cultural Aspects*) appeared in 1933. He was inspired by Ellsworth Huntington's *The Character of Races*, published in 1924, that had included a description of the Hakkas as a particularly hardy people, comparable to the 'puritans who went from England to America'.

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<sup>11</sup> Luo Xianglin (1905-1978) graduated in History from Tsinghua University in 1930 and was admitted directly to the graduate school to research on Tang history and the origins of the peoples of Guangdong (Luo Jingzhi 1995, 18).

Luo's research wanted to make a physical examination and measurement of the Hakkas to be compared with the features of other Han people, so as to map out any differences. Similarly, he planned to conduct a survey of their blood types and to devise tools for testing differences in intelligence. The purpose was to 'see which differences and similarities there all in all are and to research the reasons as well as the consequences thereof' (Luo Xianglin 1933, 1). He wanted to look at their places of settlement, and to conduct a general survey of their geographical environment, social organisation, trades, modes of production, distribution and consumption, education, demographic distribution, birth, death, and marriage rates, specific cultural traits, artefacts, and popular traditions, group psychology, corporate morality, historical legends, and new and old works of literature. He also hoped to conduct a detailed survey of the dialect in each area of settlement. The planned work also included examining, compiling and publishing various historical sources on the Hakkas, compiling statistics of their achievements, describing the physical geography and climatology of their regions of settlement, compiling and publishing classified descriptions of their culture and customs, and of their scholarship. Finally, it also included a survey of overseas Chinese of Hakka origin.

Luo's survey was a research assignment from the National Research Institute (Guoxue Yanjiusuo) of Yen-ching University. Although Luo had the help of some assistants during some of the surveys, the aims of the research were much too ambitious, and he had to make crippling shortcuts. Due to social and political unrest, large Hakka areas were out of bounds for him. His plan for a meticulous survey also suffered from the lack of research staff to collect and process the information needed. These obstacles limited the activities. The large comparative physiological examination of the Hakkas and other groups had to be abandoned, but he did make a survey of the physical traits of more than one hundred Hakka and Punti soldiers (Luo Jingzhi 1995, 20-21). As he was unable to travel to most of the areas in question, he relied on interviews with informants to gain a picture of the Hakkas' geographical distribution (Luo Xianglin 1933, 93). Little information could be corroborated, it merely consisted of rough estimates. He used, for example, official population statistics of ten year vintage and dubious quality. Taking such data in good faith, he drew maps and made quantitative statements about where the Hakka lived, and their proportion in the total population (Luo Xianglin 1933, 93-124). Luo coined the distinction between 'pure and non-pure Hakka settlement counties' (chun, feichun kezhu xian). There were 32 counties with an almost exclusive Hakka population, and 95 counties with some Hakka inhabitants.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> He included Taiwan (then under Japanese control) and reflected the situation before the communists 'destroyed' areas in Jiangxi and Fujian (Luo Xianglin 1933, 98).

His study of the Hakka dialect (Luo Xianglin 1933, 125-156) was not a broad comparative survey, but a small, albeit systematical, observation of his own dialect form of Xingning county (where he was born and lived until he was 20). In his approach he used norms current in the emerging scholarship on Chinese dialects, inspired by western structural linguistics. He explored the phonetic system and the grammatical structures.

He collated historical sources to reconstruct the various phases of Hakka migration from the central plain to the south (Luo Xianglin 1933, 37-92). The ideas were not new, but his use of sources, and the effort to bring them together in a coherent form, abstracting five specific phases of migration and linking them with great events in Chinese history was a significant contribution to Hakka historiography. He used an established body of historical sources (including dynastic histories, genealogies and local histories) and applied classical textual exegesis to them: His analysis was rooted in the discourse of Chinese historians at the time. Linking Hakka descent to great individuals in early Chinese history, and by explaining their migrations by dynastic change (especially by implying their resistance to the Mongol Yuan and the Manchu Qing dynasties), he presented the Hakkas as bound up with the fate of the nation.

Luo Xianglin's *Introduction to the Study of the Hakkas* was poorly documented and failed the scientific standards Luo himself set for his research. However, he used the language of modern, western-inspired science, especially in terms of quantitative enquiry and hard data, and causality (inheritance and the influence of the environment). His sociological perspective was a sort of social Darwinism, combining the ideas of racial descent with the influence of the physical environment on the community. Natural selection under the hard conditions of poor mountainous regions furnished the Hakkas with superior social and moral qualities. The aim and conclusion of his research were preconceived: The Hakkas are of Han stock. Straddling classical scholarship and modern western science, Luo was able to solicit broad support for his ideas. He incorporated the paradox of his age which was to reconcile Han cultural heritage with the modern nation state.

The themes, methods, approaches and ideas underlying all later Chinese approaches to the Hakkas are present in Luo's *Introduction*. Even the term Hakkaology (kejiaxue) for this branch of scholarship was given currency by Luo:

'Three years ago [in 1930] I met a friend in Beiping who was editing a journal; he suggested to give the scientific discipline of "Hakka research" the name "Hakkaology"; however I find it necessary to have a suitable attitude to the sciences ... it does not befit scholars to be biased in their treatment of an issue or a discipline, or to exaggerate. That we must avoid!' (Luo Xianglin 1933, 1).

This scientific attitude and scholarly restraint earned his discipline credibility and placed it on the moral high ground; rejecting the label 'hakkaology' in such a conspicuous way made it stick.<sup>13</sup>

Hakka consciousness gained a boost with Luo Xianglin's work. Intellectual and economic elites were for the first time able to understand their Hakka background as something progressive, sanctioned by science and the national cause. The study of the Hakkas allowed many problems to be resolved by keen historians, linguists, sociologists and genealogists, and debates about these issues.

### **The Tsung Tsin Association**

It was the Wollcott affair in Suzhou that inspired the establishment of Hakka associations in China's few metropolitan cities Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou in 1920-1921. In the Summer of 1921 Hakka activists from Guangzhou visited Hakkas in Hong Kong and encouraged them to establish an association in Hong Kong. At a preparatory meeting in September 1921, more than one hundred Hakkas inaugurated an organisation with Huang Maolin as President. They protested against Wollcott's book to the publisher, the Commercial Press in Shanghai, by making the Hakkas' contributions to the development of Chinese culture known, and by demonstrating how the Hakkas had mustered great scholars and officials throughout the centuries. The aim was to refute Wollcott's statement that the Hakkas were a wild tribe living in Guangdong's mountains.

Huang Maolin proposed to create a permanent organisation of the Hakkas in Hong Kong. Hong Kong had created the right conditions for the emergence of a Hakka bourgeoisie, mainly people who had immigrated to Hong Kong from other parts of China. Huang Maolin was specific:

'People of our descent sojourning (qiaoju) in Hong Kong form a group for whom it would be fit to establish a permanent organisation, so that all fellows (tongxi renshi) may join together, promote friendly fellow-villager relations (dunmu xiangyi), further the development of fellow industry and commerce, encourage degree studies, publish specialised books in order to propagate Hakka origins, history, language culture and illuminaries' (Yi Tang 1950, 3).

Huang Maolin proposed a hybrid organisation on the model of a traditional native place association (huiguan or tongxianghui). It was not aimed at and did not consider the large

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<sup>13</sup> See also Wang Dong (1996, 5-9) for a thorough discussion.

contingent of Hakka peasants native to Hong Kong, living in the New Territories. It was meant for Hakka immigrants, mainly traders and intellectuals, and was to have a task of publicising Hakka culture. However, on the initiative of another founder, Li Duanqin, the Association must not refer to 'Hakka' in its name. Hakka, he reasoned, referred to the animosity between Hakkas and Puntis, so it was better to adopt the term 'chongzheng' and call the Association for the Tsung Tsin General Chamber of Commerce (Chongzheng Gongshang Zonghui) (Yi Tang 1950, 3).<sup>14</sup> 'Chongzheng' can probably best be translated as 'veneration and justice'. The implied humility and the declared aim of avoiding ethnic divisions signalled that Hong Kong's Hakka bourgeoisie was determined to occupy the moral high ground as staunch supporters of national unity.

The apparent contradiction between fostering friendly fellow-villager sentiments and furthering the cause of nation-building beyond ethnic and localist sub-divisions exists more broadly in Chinese tradition. The state capacity in dynastic times was based on the state's ability to homogenise its elites across the country and by imposing an orthodoxy emulated by local elites and commoners; this cultural uniformity counterpoised the state's co-optation and schematic assertion of local difference. Certain aspects of culture were by their nature supposed to be local and thereby different. Utilising local advantage and claiming difference with neighbours, local elites gained sources of authority.<sup>15</sup> When the bourgeois Hakka activists in Hong Kong claimed 'fellow-villager' identity, they did not claim difference as hide-bound ethnics opposed to the wider Han-Chinese nation, but emphasised their unity with other Han-Chinese.

In 1922, the Tsung Tsin Association established a school in Hong Kong, whose language of instruction was Hakka (apart from one daily hour taught in Cantonese). The school activities grew to become an important activity of the Association. In 1940, the Association opened schools in the New Territories; by now, they had become socially concerned with their fellow-Hakkas living in the rural areas of the crown colony. The national rallying in the early 1940s to defy the Japanese invasion of China caused the Association to adopt Mandarin in teaching (Jinxi jinian tekan bianji weiyuanhui 1971, 2-3).

The Tsung Tsin Association claimed to represent all Chinese of Hakka origin and was dedicated to the nationalist cause. Luo Xianglin's Hakka studies provided the Association with an ideological framework, and he contributed to its further development.

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<sup>14</sup> The changes in the name of the Tsung Tsin Association are recorded in Jinxi jinian tekan bianji weiyuanhui (1971, 2-3).

<sup>15</sup> See Cohen (1994) and Liu and Faure (1996) for elaborations on this theme.

The politics in China during the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s hardly lent themselves to ethnic indulgence. The power struggles and war-fare were a fertile ground for ethnic competition, and both the nationalist camp and the communist base areas were infested with Hakka-Punti animosities. Both used these sentiments strategically. Both were clear in their official policy: Hakkas were not a group apart, they were Han Chinese. Hakka-Punti conflicts were seen as unfortunate products of history. Leaders of Hakka origin in both camps played down their background. The Tsung Tsin Association in Hong Kong, by contrast, was a repository of Hakka identity during this time. It was a voluntary organisation<sup>16</sup> running schools, benevolent programmes and promoting Hakka identity, and also a rallying point for Hakka organisations overseas.

Overseas Chinese tended to organise themselves in native-place organisations, reflecting the origin of their ancestors (the zuji or jiguan). Organisations were linked within speech groups, reflecting major dialects or sub-dialects. Place of origin in China and dialect normally overlapped in terms of jurisdiction. For example, the Cantonese stemmed from Guangzhou and Zhaoqing in Guangdong, the Teochius from Chaozhou in Guangdong, the Hokkiens from Fujian, and the Hainanese from Hainan. By contrast, the Hakkas were spread over larger areas, and the 'home' Hakkas lived interspersed with all other dialect groups. There was, so to say, no 'home' jurisdiction or specific place where the overseas Hakkas could vest their feeling of belonging.

Lacking one specific area or jurisdiction for their 'localist' affection, the Hakkas overseas could use the Hong Kong Tsung Tsin Association as a 'home' reference, as a repository of their ethnic separateness.

### **The Basel Mission and its Influence on Hakka Identity**

The Basel Mission<sup>17</sup> began in the 1840s (after the Nanjing Treaty allowed mission work on Chinese territory) to proselytise among the Hakkas in southern China from a base in Hong Kong. The Basel Mission was of Lutheran denomination. Their mission was specifically directed towards the Hakkas, perhaps because they saw their history and the stereotypes about their frugality, stubbornness and perseverance as qualities similar to their own religious ideals. The mission used Hakka speech, which the missionaries learned and provided with a romanised written form. The missionary work reinforced the idea that the

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<sup>16</sup> Its scope of operation and social orientation indicate that it was a voluntary organisation in its practice. Its formal registration with the authorities, however, was as a limited company; the Governor had exempted it from carrying 'limited' in the name.

<sup>17</sup> See Jessie and Rolland Lutz (1998) for a study of the early Basel Mission among the Hakkas.

Hakkas had their own identity. In 1924, the Basel Church or Hakka Church, as it became known, was reorganised to become the Tsung Tsin Synod, with headquarters in Hong Kong. The name Tsung Tsin, adopted several years before by the Tsung Tsin Association, was thus appropriated as a term to replace the Hakka label. The missionaries encountered severe difficulties in their work. The force of the lineage obligations and the need for inter-family cooperation in agriculture conflicted in many ways with church membership. Breaking with ancestor worship and disturbing the continuity of the lineage by strict adherence to monogamy (even where the first wife did not bear sons) seriously disturbed Hakka society; keeping the Sunday as holy sabbath was almost impossible in villages that relied on coordination of labour input, and collective management of paddy fields.

The Basel missionaries were mainly successful among migrant Hakkas in Hong Kong, but gradually established small parishes in Guangdong. They hardly ever reached the social and cultural elites among the Hakkas (this may partly explain their difficulty in achieving conversions among the Hakkas). Even so, their introduction of written Hakka, education of Hakka men and women, their own obsession with the separate character of the Hakkas, and their ability to provide alternative avenues to careers and power all did contribute to the formation of Hakka identity. Many Hakkas' road to modern learning and knowledge of the world came from training in missionary schools; they gained an asset of great importance when China developed as a modern nation state.

Luo Xianglin is an example of this. He was a native of Xingning County (the largest Basel missionary district in China with more than 900 converts), went to a missionary school as a child and later became a member of Basel or Tsung Tsin congregations. The absence of references to his Christianity in his scholarship on the Hakkas is conspicuous. Yet its orientation and his ability to straddle modern science and classical text exegesis originate, one may speculate, in his early intellectual exposure to missionaries.

## **THE MAINLAND: CONTAINING HAKKA IDENTITY**

The coming to power of the communists in 1949 meant that there was little room for official recognition of a separate Hakka identity. The Hakkas, of course, regarded themselves as part and parcel of the Han nationality. Their rallying had been aimed at establishing this as a fact. In the 1950s, the communists sought to categorise and systematise the numerous national minorities, but did not consider the Hakkas. Only where national minorities had been assimilated to the Hakkas, like the She and the Yao, the issue

of Hakka identity came up. In some cases it must have been difficult to distinguish between Hakkas and She people; the She speak Hakka, have adopted lineages similar to those of the Hakkas, and intermarry with the Hakkas (Yang Yanjie 1996; Wang Dong 1996, 67-69 and 220-224; Zhu Hong 1995).

An indication of the unwillingness to accept a special status for the Hakkas is clear in the abolition of Chixi County in Guangdong. Chixi Ting (sub-county) had been separated from Xinning County in the 1860s in order to house Hakkas from the region; this was part of the effort to separate the Hakkas from the Puntis after the Hakka wars. In the early Republic, Chixi became a separate county, to which the authorities consistently appointed Hakkas as magistrates. In the 1950s, the county was abolished and joined Taishan county.<sup>18</sup>

Mary Erbaugh (1992; 1996) complains that the authorities in the Mainland practice a 'public silence' about the Hakkas:

'What is not voiced publicly, but is a matter of pride within mainland Hakka circles, is the role of Hakka in communist revolution' (1996, 198).

The fact that a large number of people with Hakka ancestry or Hakka speakers have been identified as active in the communist revolution is perhaps by some of them proudly attributed to their Hakka character, yet this interpretation is, according to Erbaugh, banned from mainland historiography. Indeed, Hakkas who gain high social or political status are not publicly hailed as Hakkas, but as Chinese. Personally, they tend to avoid the Hakka label, while not normally denying their Hakka roots. Why this silence?

Erbaugh is mistaken when she claims that the 'public silence' is matched by hidden pride. The members of the Chinese elite that could be labelled 'Hakka' or 'of Hakka origin' do not derive their political or cultural status from a Hakka constituency. A publicly stated Hakka label is not a political asset that can be used to gain access to power. To the contrary, a famous person gains more by distancing himself from such a label, and is likely to be the unwilling object of pride. However, in specific contexts, people of Hakka stock may help each other to advance in political hierarchies. Where national-level Chinese politics features 'gangs' (bang) from Shanghai, Beijing and other places, Hakka 'gangs' are found in local politics.

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<sup>18</sup> Xinning county changed its name to Taishan in 1914. On the background of Chixi County, see Wang Dong (1996, 175-177).

## Formal Classifications and Identities

The key to Chinese sub-ethnic identities is the grid of official classifications from which they can derive their vitality. The Hakka label was a result of the allocation of land to tax-paying lineages under the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). The lineages included in the state through the official tax registers became the 'autochtones'. People not registered within this system, especially poor people or later in-migrants were in the nineteenth century regarded as 'allochtones' or Hakkas. The Hakka label, therefore, reflected an official classification that determined access to resources and created the basis for social exclusion.<sup>19</sup>

Hakka is not a recognised classification of the Chinese Republic (1911-1949) or the People's Republic of China (1949-now). The Hakka label, however, was perpetuated as an apocryphic distinction. The Chinese party and state are not concerned with it and do not accept Hakka as a correct 'category' (tifa). It is considered to be in conflict with the principles of 'national unity' (minzu tuanjie), presenting the perspective of 'splittism' (fenliezhuyi). That a category is not correct does not, in Chinese political culture, mean that it is suppressed. It will only be suppressed if it is considered to have directly harmful consequences; it is more likely to be ignored and deprived of the opportunity for authoritative conceptualisation. However, the Chinese authorities are forced to deal with it because Hakka identity and Hakka movements exist internationally and because it is in the interest of the Chinese state to keep a tag on such movements.

Official behaviour of the People's Republic of China towards the Hakka issue is most likely to contain the phenomenon. In the absence of directly formulated policies, I infer some conditions here.

Debates are confined to specific, scholarly publications. They are conducted within the auspices of a research centre set up at East China Normal University in Shanghai, and a Hakkaology Research Association in Fujian. Smaller research institutes are set up at Jiaying University in Mei County and similar places, and individual researchers work in Chinese or history departments of other universities. Hakkaological research in China was revived by Wu Ze in the 1980s, and given continuity by Wang Dong, who authored *Introduction to Hakkaology* (1996). It did not really take root until the international Hakkaology conferences started in 1992. There is a great scope of freedom for the scholars to debate, publish, collect materials, interact with colleagues internationally, and to use their own academic judgement and standards. One fundamental restriction is that the Hakka may not be conceived of as anything but a descent group (minxi) pertaining to the Han nationality.

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<sup>19</sup> This interpretation can be inferred from Faure (1989).

At local levels, the writing of Hakka history is dealt with as local history. The writing of local histories (*difangzhi*) took off in the 1980s under the auspices of the local Chinese People's Political Consultative Conferences. The collection of historical materials and memoirs is highly structured and geared to include local ethnographic characteristics. This established structures for grass-roots level historiography of the Hakkas in accordance with the general practice in Han communities.

Wang Dong (1996) formulated the main directions for the Hakkaological research agenda. The general thrust is that of a continued historical inquiry, a revision of Luo Xianglin's theses. He envisages the endeavour in the form of ethnography, historiography, cultural anthropology, human geography, and cultural area studies. Historiography is supplemented with field work, but such field work examines 'religious beliefs, customs and speech', and provides 'complementary documentary material' (Wang Dong 1996, 25). Hakkaology in Wang Dong's perspective is retrospective, aimed at exploring a heritage. Wang Dong justifies Hakkaology because: (a) the Hakka descent group is globally organised; (b) the study of the Hakka can give a lead in the general study of the Han; (c) the Hakka in the world share a common identity and lifestyle no matter where they are in China and the world; and (d) Hakka culture is the epitome of the multidimensionality of Han culture (Wang Dong 1996, 17-19). This sums up the dual rationale for studying the Hakkas: They are a global force and a key to understanding Han culture.

Hakkaology as a separate discipline prevents the Hakka issue from percolating into general Chinese historiography, literature, linguistics, sociology, anthropology, genetics, and so on. The cooperation with the Hong Kong Tsung Tsin Association and the links to the Hakkas globally made Hakkaology necessary. The continuation of Luo Xianglin's normative work was the basis on which the Mainland scholars could coopt the overseas Hakkas.

Hakkaology elevates the Hakka identity issue to the status of a science and precludes the evolution of a popular movement. Debates on Hakka identity have a 'limited licence'. Hakka identity issues are debated outside the general school curricula and research agendas and are not a topic of wider public debates. Hakkaologists in the Mainland tread a fine line between their limited licence and the political aim of creating an international focal point for the Hakkas outside China.

The themes of the international Hakkaology conferences (see for example Xie Jian and Zheng Chiyan 1994) indicate the general retrospective and essentialist thrust of Hakkaology. The cooperation with French scholars from the Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient for a three-year programme financed by the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation in Taiwan gives a similar impression (Fang Xuejia 1996). The research is concentrated on the

rural Hakka districts in northern Guangdong, southern Jiangxi and western Fujian. It is based on the idea that rural China is a better reflection of traditional China than the cities, that it is a repository of tradition, and that the modernisation process in China is about to destroy a precious heritage. It is by all standards a retrospective, antiquarian recording of a world almost lost. It embodies cultural essentialism in its finest form. The aim of field work is to make notes of old people's recollections of rituals and practices. No effort is made to chart contemporary Hakka identities.

The Hakkaological insights relate to 'core' Hakka districts regarded as 'typical' of the Hakka. They provide stuff for root-seeking Hakkas all over the world, keen to see their forefathers' ways explained simply and authoritatively. Objectifying Hakka virtues, traditions and speech forms as bound up with the village and the historical past, provides the urbanised Hakka with the myth of a lost rural idyll, and de-emphasises motifs that could feed an 'ethnic' revival.

#### **TAIWAN: HOME OF THE HAKKAS?**

The Taiwanese Hakka revival follows totally different dynamics. After Taiwan returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1945 with the Japanese surrender, the nationalists established control over the island. They clamped down on local political groups that had sought a kind of home rule under Japan (the occupying power between 1895 and 1945), and groups that strove for independent statehood following the end of World War Two. Local political elites emerged to assume political office in the liberated Taiwan under the nationalists, but their hopes for a degree of local self-determination were thwarted when nationalist troops killed and arrested many of them in what has become known as the 28 February Incident of 1947. In 1949, the nationalists established the Republic of China on Taiwan, waiting to reconquer the Mainland from the communists. A continued state of war allowed the nationalists to exempt themselves from constitutional provisions on democracy.

The political and economic power in Taiwan was unequally divided between the 'outsiders' or 'mainlanders' (waishengren, daluren) and the 'locals' or 'taiwanese' (benshengren, taiwanren). The term 'Mainlanders' designates the people who fled from the Mainland and settled in Taiwan between 1945 and 1951. The Mainlanders, even though they only constituted about 14 per cent of the total population, dominated the economy. Although the nationalists officially did not distinguish between different parts of the population (imposing a unifying Mandarin-based culture on the island), in reality they kept up a social

barrier that made it difficult for Taiwanese to penetrate the political and economic elite (Chang 1994).

The Taiwanese majority consisted mainly of descendants of Hoklo migrants from Fujian who had arrived during the Qing Dynasty (1648-1911). Their dominant speech form was Hokkien (Minnanhua). There is also a substantial group of descendants of Hakkas among the Taiwanese, and about 300,000 aborigines of Malayo-Polynesian stock. There are no reliable statistics to distinguish the Hoklo and Hakka segments of the Taiwanese population, and even statistics on the Mainlander and Taiwanese division are tenuous, due to a high degree of intermarriage across the divides. Clyde Kiang (1991, 122) probably overstates the number of Taiwan's Hakkas in the 1990s when he claims that they constitute more than five million or 25 per cent of the total population or almost one-third of the Taiwanese population. Lin Jiacheng (1995, 174-175) is probably closer to the truth when he estimates that the Hokkienese constitute 70 per cent of the population, the Hakkas 15 per cent, the Mainlanders 13 per cent and the aborigines 1.5 per cent. Alan Wachmann (1994, 16-17), however, calls our attention to the fact that Hakka identity is likely to cut across the Mainlander-Taiwanese divide, as a substantial part of the Mainlanders arriving in 1945-1951 were of Hakka origin. The ethnic division lines are not clear-cut.

The Taiwanese segment of the population is normally regarded as undivided, and only the Mainlander-Taiwanese dichotomy is considered politically important (Wu 1994; Chang 1994). The economic and social development of Taiwan, combined with changes in the international environment helped remove the rigid division imposed by the elite centered around the Nationalist Party. The rural reforms and rapid industrial development created a new Taiwanese middleclass, and increasing affluence and welfare generated new expectations; homogenising education and public culture did wash away ethnic distinctions over the decades, and the diverse groups intermarried. The new economic prowess of the Taiwanese conflicted glaringly with their lack of political participation in Chiang Kai-shek's one-party dictatorship. The declining credibility since the early 1970s (when Chiang's government lost China's seat in the UN to the government in Beijing) of the nationalist government's claim to govern all China and the increasing diplomatic isolation gradually devoided the nationalist government of the reasons for upholding its dictatorship. The easing of cross-Strait tensions in the 1980s and substantial Taiwanese investments in the Mainland further undermined the siege mentality. The crumbling of the 'Soviet empire' after 1989 also led the USA to give up its strategic Cold-War reliance on puppet dictatorships to 'contain communism'. This combination of factors facilitated Taiwan's gradual democratization process.

The process was started by Lee Teng-hui (Li Denghui), a Taiwan-born former mayor of Taipei and governor of Taiwan province, who was elected vice-president in 1984. In 1986, Lee Tenghui helped Chiang Kai-shek's son and successor President Chiang Ching-kuo start a gradual process of constitutional reform aimed at introducing a multi-party democracy with general elections. When Chiang Ching-kuo died in 1988, Lee became president. He was reelected in 1990. In 1996 he won Taiwan's first direct popular presidential election. The Nationalist Party has changed radically to become a broad, all-inclusive party, appealing both to the Mainlander and the Taiwanese constituencies.

The democratization process had a dual effect on the ethnic divisions. The nationalists' inner-party reform was opposed by hard-line Mainlander factions. This fuelled political activism among Taiwanese against the Mainlanders (Chang 1994, 100-103). New parties fanned old acrimonies in order to gain votes, playing the ethnic card, a strategy that partly showed in voting patterns (Wu 1994). The rise of civil society and the recognition of interest groups in society set off a wave of claims-making towards society. On the ethnic front, aboriginal activism aimed at restoring non-sinicised names, revising text books, and introducing aboriginal languages as teaching languages. Hakka activists called for public use of their dialect in schools and the media, and so on. As a countercurrent to the prevailing sanitised, homogenising, Mainlander-imposed history writing, local history, dialect and cultural root-seeking gained ground among Taiwan's elites.

Howard Martin (1994) divides the Taiwanese Hakka movement into the traditionalists, moderats and radicals. They all shared a political concern of being marginalised:

'For activists, the immediate stimulus for organized action was the observation that ethnic Hokkien dominated opposition politics, and that views in opposition circles about language, history and access to power in Taiwan assumed a distinctly Hokkien bias. Uneasy about Hokkien chauvinism and the opposition's failure to distinguish Hakka from Hokkien, Hakka sought means to express their concerns, based on the perception that 'a number of ethnic Hokkien have evidently gone in the direction of nation building which considers Hokkien to be a primary constituent'' (Martin 1994, 224).

The traditionalists, according to Martin, derive Hakka pride from what one could call the old argument underlying Luo Xianglin's work: The Hakka descent from the northern plain, and the northern origin of the dialect. The descent and blood relationships with the Mainland are taken as both implicit and explicit arguments for reunification at some point. The moderates, in Martin's view, recognise Taiwan's Chinese identity, but see the interests of the island diverge from the Mainland's. The moderates feel that they are tools in the

hands of the large parties, and that their specific interests are not catered for. They are, therefore, caught in a dilemma. They do not feel a strong cross-strait bond, and are therefore not pursuing the reunification policy; yet they realise that they form a weak political constituency in Taiwan. The Hakka radicals have usurped the public arena through skilful media work and activism. On the one hand, they reflect a fear that Hakka dialect and other traits of identity are gradually disappearing in a homogenised metropolitan Chinese lifestyle. The radicals invent a new Hakka identity based on 'a new view of recent, shared history on Taiwan', rejecting the 'pride in a fabled past' (Martin 1994, 228). The 'new Hakkas' are fighters for democracy in an independent Taiwan. Activism is needed in order to reclaim what the nationalists deprived them: Their share in the Taiwanese history:

'The common thread running through these ideas is that Hakka history on Taiwan is blank because the Hakka are a powerless minority. Researching history, then, is a way to establish the place of Hakka in modern society and to reclaim or invent a satisfactory vision of the past' (Martin 1994).

The spectrum of Hakka radicalism is very broad, ranging from sentimental and picturesque descriptions of Hakka customs, achievements, popular culture and daily life in Taiwan (exemplified in Huang Qiufang's *An Account of Hakka Life in Taiwan*, 1993) to hard-hitting radio piracy. Taiwan New Tone, 'not for nothing known as TNT', has been targeted by the police for its unlicensed broadcasting activities, several times facing confiscation of their equipment and heavy fines. The *Economist* reported:

'TNT thinks it is being victimised. Its manager, Huang Tsu-yao, claims that the station was denied a licence because it broadcasts in the Hakka dialect of Chinese. He and other activists have protested against what they call "persecution" of the Hakka language and culture by the authorities. Some 4m Taiwanese, nearly 20% of the island's population, speak Hakka. Despite their numbers, they fear their dialect is falling into disuse'.<sup>20</sup>

Lee Teng-hui's alleged Hakka origin does little to allay the Taiwanese Hakkas' fear that they are being politically marginalised, and that their identity is declining. Clyde Kiang (1991, 123) cites a survey of the late 1980s that indicated that 83 per cent of Taiwan's Hakkas identify themselves as such, while 9 per cent regard themselves as Taiwanese and only 8 per cent as Chinese; however, 32 per cent of the respondents report that their children do not know Hakka.

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<sup>20</sup> *Economist*, 14.01.1995, volume 334, issue 7897, p. 34.

The Hakka revival in Taiwan, in conclusion, reflects dynamics particular to the democratization process on the island. The erosion of Hakka identity is sustained by the continuous use of Mandarin in public media, and the pressure from dominant Hokkien groups. The further evolution of democratic structures in Taiwan are likely to reveal that the rallying issues are not likely to be centered on ethnicity, but that there is a scope for Hakka activism on the fringes of the political scene.

### **GLOBAL HAKKA: A PARADOX?**

Overseas Chinese of Hakka descent are a mixed group, if a group at all. They have maintained a large network of Hakka organisations, which since the 1920s has been centered on Hong Kong, through the Tsung Tsin Association. The Mainland coopted the Hong Kong Tsung Tsin Association for promoting links between the main Hakka areas in China and the overseas Chinese of Hakka descent. The main linkage was through the development of Hakkaology as a 'new discipline'<sup>21</sup> to continue the past cooperation between the Hong Kong Tsung Tsin Association and Luo Xianglin. The new setting was a cooperation between the East China Normal University, a Hakkaological study association in Fujian, the Chinese University in Hong Kong, and the Tsung Tsin Association. The provision of historical information and debate, and a well-structured linkage between Hakka 'home' counties and overseas Chinese was seen as an adequate framework. The Taiwanese authorities joined in (through the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation) by financing a French-Chinese collaborative research project on the Hakkas.

The emergence of a global, homogenised Chinese culture, and Chinese elites that interact across political systems, national borders and individual citizenship creates a counter-current of asserting sub-ethnic identities. The ability to play on multiple identities and sources of power has always been important among overseas Chinese. The Hakka identity furnishes a powerful form of sub-ethnic identification, shared around the globe. Many Hakkas claim that there exists a closely knit network of Hakka brethren to whom they can always turn for information and help. They create a myth of mutual help and trust, which has little to do with the reality in terms of business transactions or any activity other than perhaps general friendliness and courtesy. Global Hakka identity gives a reference of status,

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<sup>21</sup> See formulation in *South China Morning Post*, 22.10.1996, p. 12: 'New Discipline Aims to Redress Widespread Misconceptions about an Ancient People'.

it is a pointer to a constituency that is considered powerful. For Hakkas who operate globally, the maintenance of an ethnic 'infrastructure' is a core asset.

For other Hakkas, their identity is eroding. Second- and third-generation Hakkas may sometimes understand Hakka, but normally do not speak it. Many have learnt Cantonese and Mandarin and use them for social communication. Some even have lost their ability to use any form of Chinese functionally, relying on the main language of their country of residence. For such people, the re-capturing of Hakka dialect and root-seeking can become important aims in life. Hakka speech and the 'home' appear distant and unreal, yet are coveted elements of personal identification.

The Tsung Tsin Association provides a conduit for knowledge and the use of Hakka speech. In addition, a wide circle of popularisers have emerged, fired by the determination to seek their roots. An undergrowth of imaginative identity-constructing activities flourishes. Just to mention two examples: In Britain, Wang Guanqiu for several years at the beginning of the 1990s churned out a profusion of articles on Hakka customs and history in *Siyu Chinese Times*. In the USA, Clyde Kiang (Jiang Yungui) has totally reformulated theories of Hakka origin, providing mind-boggling new perspectives. He, among other things, claims that they are racially different from the Han, closer to the Koreans and Japanese. During their long migrations they hardly 'intermingled' with other races, but on their arrival in Taiwan became Taiwanese. They form the core of an independent Taiwan (Kiang 1991; Jiang 1996). Clyde Kiang's works constitute a search for a meaningful future of Hakka identity, a search hampered by the intractability of the Hakka classification itself.

Overseas Hakka root-seekers are faced with a particular identity problem, related to the definition of a Hakka. For Hakkas in Taiwan or in Hong Kong, and perhaps in a small number of counties in China the answer is easy: They live in a context where the classification has some (albeit declining) social and political importance. For other Hakkas the definition becomes evasive and troublesome. Does one lose the identity together with the language? Does the Hakka status really imply a moral or mental superiority above other Chinese? Is it in the heritage, the blood line? Can this descent be traced through DNA tests? Is the migration myth true? The need, in other words, to rely on a multitude of essentialist arguments becomes critical when one is about to lose the identity and the ability to use the speech form.

Hakka web-sites and discussion groups on the internet make available a wide range of opinions on Hakka identity, shared across the globe at the click of a mouse. Some home pages present a regurgitation of the most prominent Hakkaological findings, while others are based on wild and fanciful statements about the Hakka, including programmes for

action that stand little chance of being followed, like, for example, preventing overseas Hakka children from learning Cantonese or Mandarin until they are fluent in Hakka.

## CONCLUSION

The present paper has sought to explore the evolution of a sub-ethnic Chinese identity, examining how it has been linked to a range of political contexts. It has never been a political force in itself, but it has always been highly politicised. Its origin in the competition for resources is an important starting point. The assertion of the pure Han origin of the Hakkas included them in the modern project of building a nation state. The science of the Hakkas, Hakkaology, was constructed in the 1930s to encompass modern learning and classical scholarship, in order to give the Hakka cause credibility. The Hakka revival in the Mainland in the 1980s and 1990s was aimed to woo overseas Chinese and to limit the potential for sub-ethnic divisions. The Hakka revival in Taiwan around the same time reflected political agendas by new political actors under emerging democracy and civil society.

A future research agenda on the Hakkas could focus on the wide range of contemporary dynamic forces that influence the Hakka identification in different settings.

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