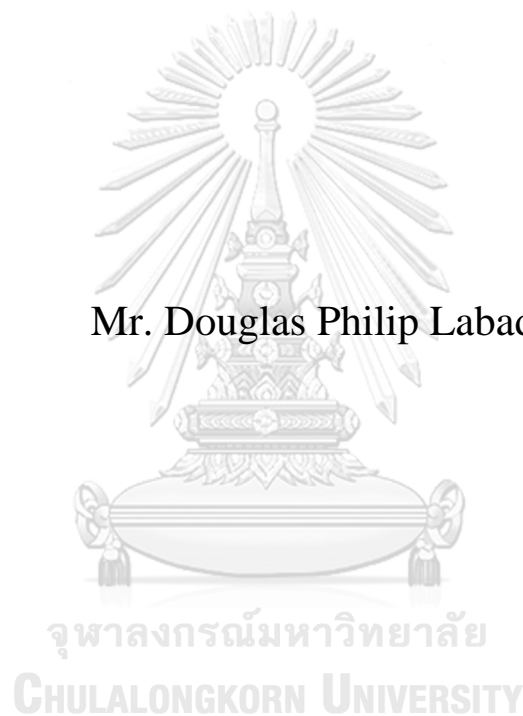


The Cultural Assimilation of the Hakka Communities in
Southeast Asia: The Case of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and
Bangkok, Thailand

Mr. Douglas Philip Labadin



A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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การกลืนกลายทางวัฒนธรรมของชุมชนจีนและในเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้:
กรณีศึกษากรุงกัวลาลัมเปอร์ ประเทศมาเลเซีย และกรุงเทพมหานคร ประเทศไทย



วิทยานิพนธ์นี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตรปริญญาศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต
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ปีการศึกษา 2564
ลิขสิทธิ์ของจุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

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ราโท

บ ท ก ค ย อ
ชุมชนจีน และได้อพยพจากประเทศจีน และกระจายตัวไปตามพื้นที่ต่างๆ ทั่วโลก
โดยทยอยย้ายถิ่นในเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้
วิทยานิพนธ์ฉบับนี้มุ่งศึกษาการกลืนกลายทางวัฒนธรรมของชุมชนจีนและในประเทศไทยและประเทศมาเลเซียโดย
เน้นชุมชนจีนและในเขตกรุงเทพมหานครและกรุงกัวลาลัมเปอร์
ในการศึกษาครอบคลุมประเด็นทางวัฒนธรรมต่างๆ ได้แก่ เทศกาลและพิธีกรรม ศาสนาและการบูชาเทพเจ้า
สมาคมจีนและภาษาอาหารและศิลปวัฒนธรรมที่หลงเหลืออยู่ในชุมชนจีนและ
วิทยานิพนธ์นี้มุ่งศึกษาเปรียบเทียบความเหมือนและความต่างของชุมชนจีนและในมหานครทั้งสองรวมถึงปัจจัยที่ส่ง
ผลต่อความเหมือนหรือความต่างนี้
การศึกษานี้พบว่าปัจจัยสำคัญที่ส่งผลต่อความเหมือนต่างของภาวะการกลืนกลายทางวัฒนธรรมเกิดจากนโยบายแ
และการปฏิบัติตามนโยบายของรัฐบาลท้องถิ่น รวมถึงความจำเป็นที่ต้องยึดโยงกับความเป็น “จีน”
โดยรวบรวมมากกว่าอัตลักษณ์เฉพาะของจีนเฉพาะกลุ่ม
เช่นเดียวกันกับการแต่งงานข้ามวัฒนธรรมและความสัมพันธ์อันใกล้ชิดระหว่างชุมชนจีนและกับชุมชนและคนพื้นถึ
น ก ล ำ ว โ ค ย ส ร ุ ป
ชุมชนจีนและในกรุงเทพมหานครสามารถปรับตัวและกลืนกลายเข้ากับคนท้องถิ่นและชุมชนจีนอื่นๆ ได้เป็นอย่างดี
ในขณะที่ชุมชนจีนและในกรุงกัวลาลัมเปอร์ แม้สามารถปรับตัวและกลืนกลายเข้ากับชุมชนจีนอื่นๆ ได้ดี
แต่การกลืนกลายทางวัฒนธรรมเข้ากับวัฒนธรรมท้องถิ่นนั้นยังไม่สำเร็จมากนัก

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สาขาวิชา เอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ศึกษา
ปีการศึกษา 2564

ลายมือชื่อนิสิต
ลายมือชื่อ อ.ที่ปรึกษาหลัก

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Since migrating from China, the Hakka communities have continued to spread all around the world, especially in the Southeast Asian region. This research puts focus on the cultural assimilation of the Hakka communities in Malaysia and Thailand, with special reference to Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok. The aspects of culture here is referring to the festivals and ceremonies, religion and worship, the Hakka association, the use of the Hakka dialect, the Hakka cuisines and delicacies, as well as the art and culture that remains until today. The aim is to compare the similarities and differences of the Hakka communities in these two cities, and also investigate on whether the Hakka culture was maintained or assimilated with the local hosts, as well as providing the factors behind this phenomenon. The research finds that the factors that contributed to the different experiences of cultural assimilation are the conditions of the national policies that are implemented by the local government, the need to unite as the “Chinese” instead of the individual Chinese ethnic groups, as well as the act of intermarriages and close relationships between the Hakkas and the locals. It is concluded that the Hakka community in Bangkok, Thailand had more success in assimilating with the local Thais, and also the other Chinese ethnic groups, whereas the Hakka community in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia did not have much success with the local Malays, but the process of cultural assimilation did take place with the other Chinese ethnic groups instead.



Field of Study:	Southeast Asian Studies	Student's Signature
	
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Douglas Philip Labadin



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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

The subject of the Chinese diaspora communities has always been an area of interest for many scholars because of the intersection of cultures that often occur between the Chinese diaspora communities and the local communities of their new settlements. For example, in Malacca, Malaysia, the interaction between the Chinese diaspora and the local Malay communities have contributed to the existence of a new and unique ethnicity, which is now widely known as the Baba Nyonya of Malacca.

The intermarriage of the two cultures is highly evident in the cuisines that are prepared by the Baba Nyonya community, and also in the customs and cultures that they choose to practice, which reflects a balance between the two communities. The concept of combining or fusing two elements together, in this case the culture of the Chinese and the local Malays, is an interesting phenomenon and further study of it could lead to greater knowledge of the subject.

According to Christiansen (1998: 2), the Hakkas are one of the seven major dialect groups that can be found in China, and since this community of nomadic travellers had experienced a gradual migration from the central area of China (Henan) towards the southern areas, the Hakka people can be found sporadically around the southern parts of China. The main path of migration that was taken up by the Hakka people was through Henan, Anhui, Jiangxi, Hunan, Fujian, Guangxi, and Hainan.

Although they do not hold any specific cultural traits, the article states that the Hakka people possess their own speech system, and this was one of the main ways that they segregated themselves from other Chinese ethnic groups. In China, the

Hakka people do not fall under the list of 56 recognized national minorities (*minzu*), but instead they are seen as a “line of descent” (*minxi*), and they are perceived to belong to the larger group of the Chinese Han majority.

An article written in the My China Roots website, in collaboration with CBA Jamaica, suggests that the Hakka migration in China can be categorized into five major waves, with the most recent one being the migration that saw many Hakka people migrating out of China instead of within the country, and this occurred between the 19th century to the early 20th century. The three major factors that motivated the migration of the Hakka people overseas were the First Opium War, the Taiping Rebellion, as well as the Hakka-Punti Clan War. These are perceived to be the “push factor” for the migration of the Hakka people, with many choosing to flee the country due to the political unrest.

During the first half of the 1800s, a significant trade deficit was made visible when the British was importing too much Chinese tea. To counter this situation, they decided to start selling opium, which was traded through the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia. However, the rate of opium addiction in China started to increase exponentially, and the import of opium was halted in order to curb this situation. Receiving this news, the British decided to send military forces to China, and thus began the First Opium War.

In the case of the Taiping Rebellion, a Hakka Christian individual named Hong Xiuquan decided to start an uprising that would require his Hakka followers to rebel against many subjects, such as corruption, feudalism, and traditional concepts and beliefs. In addition to that, the “Heavenly Kingdom” was also established during

this period, which reflects the level of power that is showcased by the rebellion. After 13 years of rule, the rebellion was overthrown with the help of French and British forces, and many of the Hakka people all over China were randomly executed, because it was assumed that they were part of the rebellion.

Last but not least, the Punti-Hakka Clan War occurred due to the differences in land acquisition that was owned by these two groups. Since the Punti clan claimed the fertile plains, the Hakka people were forced to settle in inferior land on the hills and waterways, and eventually this caused the tension to increase between the two groups. During the middle of the 19th century, the Punti-Hakka Clan War was ignited by several factors like overpopulation, land shortage, rural poverty, natural disasters, and a large number of unemployment incidents. This situation left around one million people to die, while many others decided to flee the nation in order to save themselves from being perished. The Hakka people suffered the most casualties as they were prominently outnumbered by the Punti clan.

These wars were the few major factors that motivated the Hakka people to migrate outside of China during the fifth wave, and many of them sought comfort in the massive region of Southeast Asia. And as these people tried to accommodate to their new lives, the negotiation of culture started to emerge between the Hakka people and the local communities of their new settlements. At present, research regarding the assimilation of culture of the Hakka people with the local communities is scarce, as most research puts focus on the migration of the Hakka people to other regions outside of China.

At present, research regarding the assimilation of culture of the Hakka people with the local communities is scarce, as most research puts focus on the migration of the Hakka people to other regions outside of China.

For this paper, more attention will be placed on how the cultures of the Hakka communities have evolved to accommodate to the new lifestyle of the community in their new homes, and the assimilation of the Hakka culture with the local community, as well as with other Chinese ethnic groups. Therefore, the research will mainly focus on the lives of the Hakka communities in two Southeast Asian cities, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Bangkok, Thailand.

1.2 Research Questions

- What are the similarities and differences between the cultural assimilation of the Hakka communities in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Bangkok, Thailand?
- How far has the Hakka community assimilated with the local communities and what are the factors that have affected the process of cultural assimilation in these cities?

1.3 Research Objectives

- To compare the similarities and differences in the Hakka communities of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Bangkok, Thailand.
- To investigate whether the Hakka culture was preserved in its original form or assimilated with the local culture, and what are the factors that contributed to these situations.

1.4 Hypothesis

It is argued that the cultural assimilation of the Hakka communities in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Bangkok, Thailand is different due to several factors. Therefore, the Hakka community in Bangkok, Thailand had more success in assimilating with the local community, which are the Thais, while also assimilating with other Chinese ethnic groups; whereas the Hakka community in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia had more success assimilating with the other Chinese ethnic groups in the area, instead of with the local community, which are the Malays.

1.5 Research Methodologies

1.5.1 Document Research

Due to the current situation of the Covid-19 pandemic, the main method for conducting this research will be based on literature sources and materials such as books, articles, past research and many more. All the information will be compiled into a specific section in this research.

1.5.2 Fieldtrips and Groundwork

The Hakka Association of Thailand, which is located in Samphanthawong, Bangkok will be visited during this research, as well as the local temple that is attached to the main building.

1.5.3 Interviews

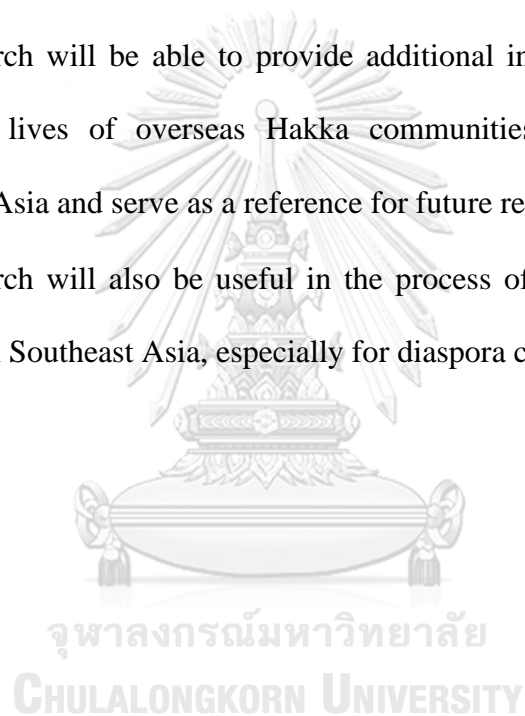
For this research, several experts of the Hakka community in both cities will be interviewed and information will be gathered to illustrate the section on the Hakka community in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Bangkok, Thailand.

1.5.4 Focus Group

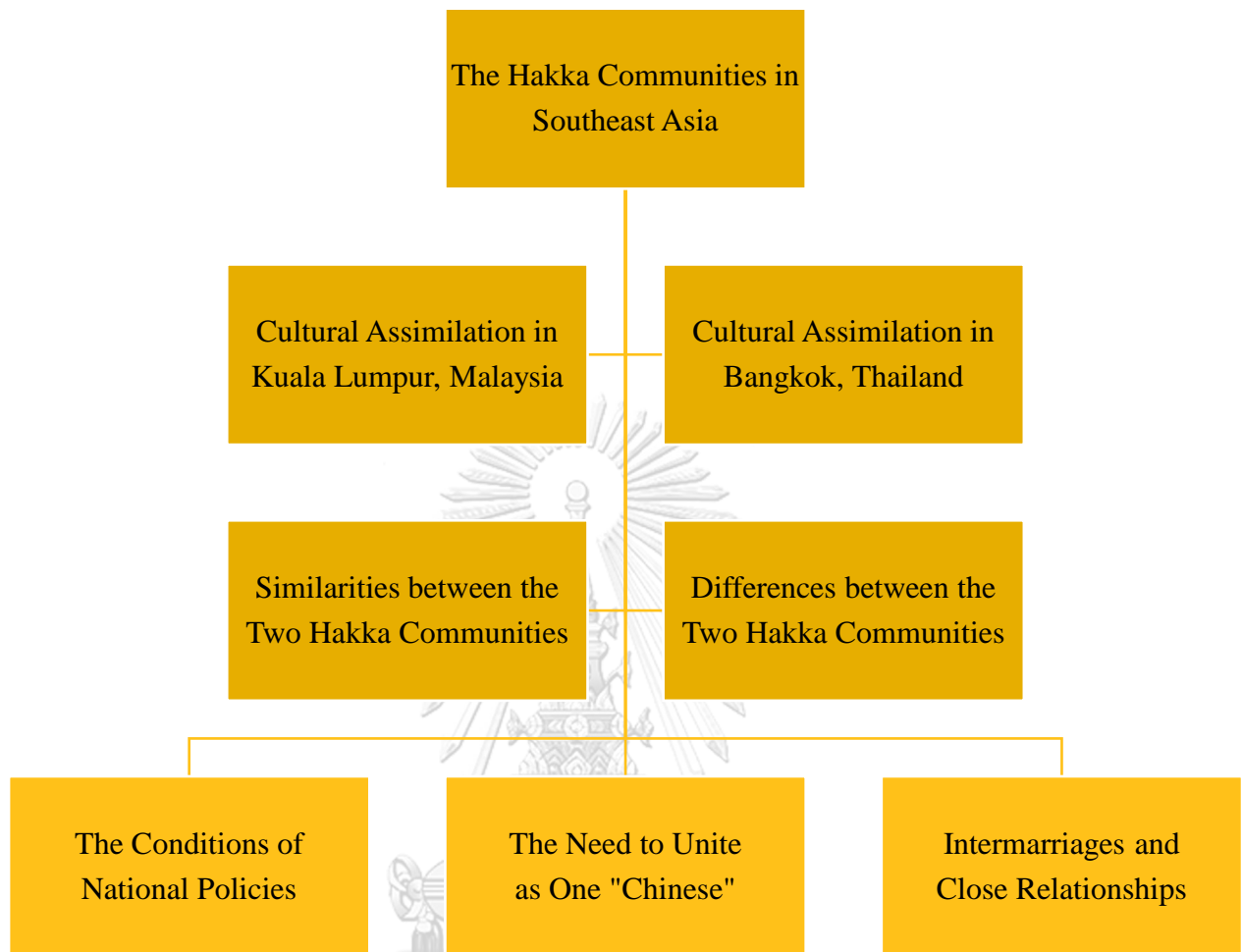
A group of eight to ten participants will be gathered for an online focus group that will be conducted through the Zoom platform, in which questions regarding their life as a Hakka person in their cities will be discussed, as well as cultural practices that they still apply in their daily lives.

1.6 Usefulness of Research

- This research will be able to provide additional information and knowledge about the lives of overseas Hakka communities who have migrated to Southeast Asia and serve as a reference for future research.
- This research will also be useful in the process of policy making for plural societies in Southeast Asia, especially for diaspora communities.



1.7 Research Framework



For this research, two case studies have been chosen and they are Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Bangkok, Thailand. One of the main reasons that these two areas are chosen is because both of them have a large Chinese population and presence in multiple aspects, such as in economic activities and business, food culture of the Chinese, and visibility of local clan associations. The Mandarin language is also used at large in these two cities, proving to be another indication for strong Chinese presence.

A large number of the Hakka people are concentrated in these areas due to the fact that both cities are the capital of their respective countries. Therefore, it is

believed that both of these areas have a common ground to be used as comparison, as both cities also have a designated Hakka association.

Martin Peterson (2018: 106), who is a professor at the University of Bergen, Norway, proposes several definitions for the word “culture” and “identity”. According to him, culture can be understood in a simpler sense, as a combination of traits that distinguishes one ethnic group from another whereas identity is defined as a person’s source of meaning and experience. He proposes that the understanding of these two words is intertwined due to their similar nature, and I am inclined to agree.

Apart from that, he also highlights that modern identity and culture is normally connected to the rise of nationalism and the nation-state, which is similar to the case of the Hakka communities in Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur, which will be explained further in the later chapters of this research. Besides that, the theory of cultural assimilation will also be used for this study, in order to provide the necessary tools to understand the cultural assimilation that has occurred within the Hakka communities in both cities.

1.8 Limitation of Research

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the option of doing fieldwork became very difficult as air travels were limited during this time. Therefore, the main medium of this research is highly informed by the review of existing literature regarding the Hakka communities.

1.9 Literature Review

1.9.1 An Overview of the Hakka Communities in Southeast Asia

In the region of Southeast Asia, the Hakka communities have been able to create a new life in various countries, some more so than others. Most of them migrated from China in search of a better life, and they travelled across the region to form new settlements, which created interesting negotiations of Hakka culture with the host communities, and the Hakka people had to learn how to adapt to the conditions of their new lives.

Hsiao and Lim (2007: 3) state that the identity of the Hakka community in Southeast Asia are often undermined by the demand of nationalism in their new settlements, and although the cultural elements of the Hakka people are disappearing, it is still traceable in different forms, especially when comparing the conditions in each Southeast Asian country.

The article also explains that the internal differences of the Chinese in Southeast Asia region is to be perceived as an important issue to explore, as the structural constraints that are affected by the historical, social, and political factors on these Hakka groups prove to be an important factor to consider when looking at the Hakka community in this region.

Therefore, this section will attempt to gather information about the Hakka communities in several countries of Southeast Asia, apart from Malaysia and Thailand (which will be discussed in the later chapters of this research). It is observed that countries such as Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand have a higher

concentration of Hakka communities, whereas they exist in smaller numbers in other countries of the region, such as Timor-Leste.

Lim and Wishnoebroto (2016: 275) discuss about the Hakka community in Bangka Island, Indonesia, in which the custom of Chinese New Year became the main focus of the research, which is a festive occasion that is celebrated on the 23rd day of the 12th lunar month, in which the Hakka people will “pass through the new year” and eagerly wait for the new year’s good fortune to come along.

During the Chinese New Year, many activities (or rituals) are conducted by the Hakka people, such as cleaning the house thoroughly to make way for good fortune, buying new equipment or ornaments, placing a sticker on the front door of their houses (Door Gods), preparing a dish known as basket cake, and also carrying the Kitchen God around the house.

It is stated that within the Hakka community of Bangka Island, one of the most important gods is the Kitchen God, or also known as “*Zao Shen*”. He is the god who exerts control over everything that is related to food, eating, and drinking.

The Hakka people of Bangka Island believes in the tradition of inviting the Kitchen God when they first move into a new house, in which the kitchen fire is turned on to serve as an invitation for the Kitchen God to enter the new house. It is believed that the Kitchen God is the head of the family, as his role in the spiritual realm is close to an everyday activity of the Hakka people, which is preparing food and cooking.

Apart from that, the Kitchen God also has authority over other activities that are happening in the household, as every action is supervised by the god, and the good

or bad deeds that occur in his presence will be recorded. It is also believed that the Kitchen God will ascend to the heavens to report any human error that is made during his visit.

This article shows that within the Hakka community, the role of gods and deities remain to be one of the more important cultural and religious aspects of their lives, as it is evident that all their daily activities revolve around ensuring that the god is pleased with them, which also encourages the Hakkas to stay away from any wrong doings.

In a different article by M. Ikhsan Tanggok (2013: 664), the ceremony of “*Thatung*” is discussed in detail, which translates as play (*tha*) and spirits or gods (*tung in*) in English. The term can also be understood as a person who uses mystical powers that are granted by the spirits and gods, to offer several treatments to patients such as curing diseases and predicting one’s fate. In other words, the term can also be defined as a spirit medium.

It is stated that the history of the *Thatung* started in 1774, when the region of Monterado was met with a pesky disease that was believed to have been brought by evil spirits. In response to this, a man known as Ng Kang Sen, performed a ritual that invited the good spirits to enter his body and cast away the evil spirits from the region, as he entered a state of trance. It is also believed that this ceremony is performed to clean up the village spiritually, as well as keeping the evil spirits at a distance and away from the household.

Lim and Mead (2011: 7) report that a large number of Chinese immigrants started to enter the country through the southern provinces of Indonesia during the

late 19th century to early 20th century, and the Hakkas were among the immigrants who arrived as well. The Chinese immigrants that arrived were known as “*totok*”, because they were able to speak their individual dialect; which differentiates them from the group that was known as the “*peranakan*”, who are the offspring from intermarriages between the Chinese and the Indonesian locals.

Based on the article, the Hakka people were concentrated more in certain provinces, such as Aceh, North Sumatra, Batam, South Sumatra, Bangka-Belitung, Lampung, Jawa, West Kalimantan (especially in the city of Singkawang), Banjarmasin, South Sulawesi, Manado, Ambon, and Jayapura.

For the case of Singapore, Ho (1995: 478) writes about how the Chinese community’s capability of providing mutual help is one of the main reasons as to why they were able to flourish outside of China, as the establishment of clan associations played an important role in the development of the Chinese immigrants in Southeast Asia. Various associations were established based on the principles of their original locality and surnames.

The associations were built due to the poor living condition of the Chinese immigrants when they first arrived during the late 1800s to early 1900s, in which the majority of the Chinese population is formed by the working class and dominated by the males. They faced great difficulties as they manoeuvre themselves through their labour work.

The article states that when the Hakka people first arrived in Singapore, the Cantonese term of “Hakka” did not exist yet, and they called themselves as “*Keren*”; while the Hokkiens, Teochews, Hainanese people referred to them as “*Ke*”. Even

among the Chinese ethnic groups, the Hakkas were perceived as being the minority group, although they were one of the earliest groups of Chinese immigrants to arrive in Singapore.

After surviving a long journey across the South China Sea, the Chinese immigrants would normally perform some prayer to the Goddess of Mercy, for allowing them to reach their destinations safely, as many of their friends were not able to survive the trip. For those who were unfortunate, they were respectfully buried by their friends.

Originating from different parts of China, the article explains that the Hakkas were segregated based on several factors, such as the financial capabilities of each group, the territorial proximity, and also parochial concerns. The early leaders of the Hakka community in Singapore did not do much to care for their members, due to the financial disparity between the leaders and the rest of the community. It is also mentioned in the article that the Hakkas in Singapore can be divided into several groups, which are the Jiayingzhou, Dabu, Fengshun, Huizhou, Tingzhou, Gaoliangui, and Hepo.

According to an article by Conceicao (2016: para. 5), the Hakka immigrants were involved in agriculture upon their arrival, such as growing pepper and gambier, and later on they ventured into the business of Chinese medicine, and it is believed that the largest Chinese medicine halls during the 1920s belonged to Hakka owners. Tan (1990, as cited in Conceicao, 2016: para. 7) explains that the Hakka women were known for being resilient and independent, and most of them would find work in construction sites.

The article also reflects on the cooking practices of the Hakka community. Since they were always moving from one place to another, the Hakkas would season their food with salt, as a means for food preservation. Some of the more common Hakka dishes are salt-baked chicken and rice wine, which served as a staple ingredient in many dishes. Most of the Hakka dishes are derived from meat, as this would provide a lot of nourishment to the farmers.

Zhu, Sim and Liu (2006: 13) state that in the area of Niucheshui, which became a common ground for various Chinese ethnic groups to get together, a small shrine was established by the Hakka and Cantonese people in 1824, and this temple is known as the “*Fuk Tak Chi*”, which is located along the Telok Ayer Street. This became a safe place for the ethnic Chinese communities who were living in the area to worship and gather together.

According to an online article published by National Heritage Board of Singapore (2022: para. 6), there is also a school called Ying Xin School that was set up by the Hakka association, and the characters “*Ying He Hui Guan*” are embedded in the archway located at the entrance of the school, which translates to Ying He Association in English. In the past, this school served as an important step in the education development of the Hakka school children.

In an article written by Nguyen (2018: 2), it is stated that there is a Hakka village in Buu Long, Vietnam, which has around 500 villagers. One of the reasons that the Hakka people chose to reside here is so that they could preserve the production of a traditional craft that they had started in Guangdong, as well as they found Buu Long to be a good and safe place to start their new lives.

Soon after, the Hakka villagers started to worship craft gods that could help them master their crafting skills, and this temple was later renamed “Thien Hau Ancient Temple” during the early period of the 20th century, and this resulted in the formation of the Thien Hau cult. Occasionally, the Hakka villagers would execute a vegetarian festival in order to honour the Thien Hau deity.

The Hakka community in Buu Long revere the deity of Thien Hau because once when the village was plagued by an infectious disease, the spirit of Thien Hau took over the body of a local man and instructed the villagers to collect 100 types of herbs in order to cure the village of the plague. Upon doing so, the disease stopped spreading and the village returned to normal.

The Hakkas were commonly perceived as being an elite among the minority, as their crafting skills and business have allowed them to gain a relatively high status compared to the other ethnic Chinese groups. Besides that, the Hakkas also call themselves as the “*người Họ*”, which indicates that they perceive themselves to be the high-cultured people of Hoa Ha, Vietnam.

In the Philippines, there are about 1.5 million Chinese people, whose large-scale immigration happened during the late 1500s. Liu (2014: 31) explains that the Chinese people were mostly independent, and they did not mingle much with the main society, which helped them to preserve their cultural traditions and practices.

Although the locals feared the Chinese, but it is stated that they were essential to the development of the Philippines, as they were the ones who worked as craftsmen and retailers, which were jobs that did not interest the Spaniards and the Filipinos. As

a result of that, the Chinese immigrants managed to occupy a middle economic position within the society.

The article explores Hakka political leaders in the Philippines, and one of them was Corazon Cojuangco Aquino, the first female president of the country, serving from the year 1986 to 1992. There have been mixed reactions towards her governing power because while she made waves in the development for democracy in the Philippines, but she did not do much to improve the quality of the people's lives.

Belonging to one of the 400 families who were the moguls of the Philippines' economy, Aquino came from a Chinese elite family, which had procured great economic privileges due to land holdings and tariff industries.

Rising into presidency in 1986, after defeating Marcos who cheated and was first announced the president, Aquino entered the presidential office, in which she was faced with a lot of difficulties, such as foreign debt, poverty and the rise of Communism. However, it was always her goal to focus on achieving democracy for her country, and she did. However, it is important to note that she did not do much to uphold the rights of the Hakka people during her administration, which contributes to the lack of visibility of the Hakka community.

In the case of Timor-Leste, Huber (2021: 62) explains that during the colonial period, Kupang, Lifau, and Dili became a few of the most prominent Chinese settlements, as many Chinese voyagers perceived the state to be rich in sandalwood and other valuable resources that could be useful for trade and business. Initially arriving in Timor-Leste just to conduct some business, some of the Chinese people

decided to stay and start a new life, and soon these Chinese immigrants started to dominate the economy.

It is believed that the Hakka people arrived during the second half of the 19th century, and they formed the majority of the Chinese community in Timor-Leste by the start of the 20th century. However, the amount of people who can actually speak the Hakka dialect is relatively scarce, and there are a lot of people who have surnames of Hakka origins that are not able to speak the dialect at all, which shows the low presence of the dialect within the community.

Most of the Hakka people in Timor-Leste are equipped with the knowledge of the Tetun language (which is the *lingua franca* of the Austronesian community in Timor-Leste), as well as an additional language (Portuguese, Indonesian, Mandarin, English, or other Timorese language), depending on their geometrical location. Therefore, the Hakka dialect is considered as an endangered language variety.

Upon further investigation, the article suggests that the Hakka community in Timor-Leste are more aligned with the Meixian Hakka, instead of with the Hong Kong Hakka, as some of the connotations and phonology used in the dialect has a closer match with the one that is being spoken by the former.

In addition to that, Chew and Huang (2014: 304) state that the Timorese Hakka also has a small community in Australia, in which the migration occurred when the immigration policies of disallowing Asians to enter Australia was revised and changed. It is truly evident that the Hakka people continued to be nomadic and travelled around, even after leaving China.

1.9.2 The Theory of Cultural Assimilation

“Assimilation, sometimes known as integration or incorporation, is the process by which the characteristics of members of immigrant groups and host societies come to resemble one another. That process, which has both economic and sociocultural dimensions, begins with the immigrant generation and continues through the second generation and beyond.”

(Brown and Bean, 2006: 1)

Brown and Bean (2006: 1) also state that these immigrant groups may show apparent incompleteness of their cultural assimilation with the host community due to several factors, and sometimes the process is just completely blocked, or it is just unfinished. Most times, this may have an effect on the economic and social structure, as well as the drafting of national policies, which may have dire consequences to the lives of the immigrant groups.

In hindsight, the classic model of the cultural assimilation theory perceives that the assimilation of the immigrant community follows a convergence that is direct and streamlined, in which both communities becoming more similar with one another as generations go by, and this will affect several aspects such as the norms, values, behaviours, and characteristics. This concept dates back to the Chicago School in the 1920s, and has been amplified by scholars such as Milton Gordon, Richard Alba, and Victor Nee. The former leading the original concept and theory of cultural assimilation.

In 1964, the article explains that Gordon created several stages to segregate the different levels of cultural assimilation, in which the first stage is closely linked to

structural assimilation, which means the immigrant community having close social relations with the host community. Then it is followed by other elements such as intermarriages between the two communities, their cultural identity in relation with the host, as well as the ending of discrimination and prejudice within the communities.

Alba and Nee (2003, as cited in Brown and Bean, 2006: 3) decided to refine Gordon's original theory, stating that there are several other elements that could affect the assimilation of the immigrant groups, such as the implementation of civil rights law that may put the immigrant groups at a disadvantage. Alba and Nee also highlights that the cultural assimilation process is subjected to the level of acceptance that is shown by the host community.

According to the writings of Nathan Glazer and Patrick Moynihan (1963, as cited in Brown and Bean, 2006: 3), it is explained that these scholars have the point of view of racial/ ethnic disadvantage, and they argue that ethnicity can be perceived as being a resource or it can lead to being a burden in achieving mobility of economic means.

In an attempt to fuse the two concepts together, Portes and Zhou (1993, as cited in Brown and Bean, 2006: 4), reimagined the cultural assimilation theory by taking the elements of both streamlined assimilation and the perspective of ethnic disadvantage, and created a more refined framework called segmented assimilation.

Basically, the framework suggests that structural obstacles, such as going to poor urban schools and getting no access into employment due to the immigrant's ethnicity, can lead to the stationary development of cultural assimilation, or

sometimes it even goes further backward, even though the children of these immigrant groups try to abide to the linear path in the streamlined concept of cultural assimilation.

The segmented assimilation concept also believes that these immigrant children are also subjected to rejecting the notion of assimilation completely, as they embrace behaviours and attitudes that do not go in line with the mainstream community. However, immigrant families that are not situated in a disadvantaged position, may use traditional origin-country behaviours to inspire their children to achieve a process that is known as selective acculturation. Sometimes, the mainstream communities just do not want to accept the immigrant groups.

Dasgupta (2020: 4) writes that the adaptation of immigrants to the host community can also be subjected to two aspects, psychological and socio-cultural. In the lens of the psychological aspect, an immigrant individual must show a certain sense of satisfaction when adapting to the host community, in other words the individual must show their desire to assimilate, and if that does not exist, then assimilation is not achieved completely.

On the other hand, the article defines the socio-cultural aspect as being the capabilities that are shown by an immigrant community to adapt or assimilate to the local community. This is closely related to the racial disadvantage model that was mentioned earlier, which states that immigrant community may or may not have the ability to assimilate with the locals.

Hatton and Leigh (2007: 1) contribute to the discussion by stating that the immigrants assimilate as a community, instead of just as individuals, and it is written

in the perspective of economic means. The article informs that the history of the immigrant assimilation matters, as the stronger the tradition of immigration is from a given country, the economic outcomes of those immigrant communities show a larger strength.

Fitzpatrick (1966: 2) further explains the concept of community, as it is defined as a group of people who follow a way of life or patterns of behaviour which distinguishes them from the people of a different group, or from the people that belong to the larger society that the community resides in. The people of a community are believed to have the notion of helping one another, by providing support and showing loyalty.

Therefore, this paper is informed by the knowledge that is obtained in this section, however the theory of segmented assimilation will be used as the main tool when investigating the process of cultural assimilation that has happened between the Hakka communities and their host community in the selected case studies, which are Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Bangkok, Thailand.

1.10 Structure of Research

Chapter 1: Introduction

The first chapter will serve as the starting foundation of the research, as readers will be able to obtain important information in this section, such as the rationale, research questions and objectives, the hypothesis, research methodologies, the usefulness of the research, the framework in which the research will be based on, the limitations of the research, as well as reviews of literature regarding the Hakka

community in Southeast Asia in general, as well as the summary of information about the theory of cultural assimilation.

Chapter 2: An Overview of the Hakka Community in Malaysia and the Case of Kuala Lumpur

This chapter will provide the readers with an overview of the Hakka community in Malaysia, based on important review of literature that were accessible. The chapter will begin with information regarding a resettlement movement that was conducted by the Malaysian government, which ultimately led to the concept of “New Chinese Villages”. It is then followed with information regarding the usage of the Hakka dialect, important rituals and ceremonies, as well as religious responsibilities. The chapter finishes with a detailed description about the Hakka community in Kuala Lumpur, serving as one of the case studies in this research.

Chapter 3: An Overview of the Hakka Community in Thailand and the Case of Bangkok

The following chapter discusses on the overall view of the Hakka community that has migrated to Thailand, with special reference to the case of Bangkok towards the end of the chapter. It begins with information regarding the migration process and patterns of the Hakka people into Thailand, which is then followed by a brief section on the Hakka community that was based in Ayutthaya, the former capital city of Thailand. Next, information regarding the approach of ex-prime minister, Phibun Songkhram and how that affected the identity building of the Hakka people, which leads to a section on the state of the Hakka community. Besides that, information regarding the language awareness of the Hakka community, places of worship, as well

as Hakka political leaders, will also be included in this section. Last but not least, the Hakka community in Bangkok will also be discussed.

Chapter 4: Discussion and Analysis

This chapter will present the comparison portion of the research, as the cultural assimilation of the Hakka communities in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Bangkok, Thailand will be compared in detailed. The comparison will be conducted through a series of cultural indicators, and it will be categorized like so: festivals and ceremonies, religion and worship, the Hakka association, the use of the Hakka dialect, Hakka cuisines and delicacies, as well as the art and culture of the Hakka people. The chapter continues with an analysis regarding the factors that creates the different experiences of cultural assimilation in both communities, and three main factors will be discussed: the condition of national policies, the need to unite as the “Chinese”, as well as intermarriages and close relationships.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The final chapter of the research will provide the grand summary of the whole research, which allows readers to understand the main takeaway of the research. It is then followed by a series of suggestions for future research regarding the Hakka communities in both cities, and also in Southeast Asia as a whole.

CHAPTER 2: AN OVERVIEW OF THE HAKKA COMMUNITY IN MALAYSIA AND THE CASE OF KUALA LUMPUR

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, valuable information was gathered about the different Hakka communities that are settling in Malaysia, both in the peninsular and also the islands of Borneo – Sabah and Sarawak. This section will cover various aspects of the Hakka people's lives in Malaysia, which will include the traditional labour distribution upon first arriving to Malaysia, the usage of the Hakka dialect in the day-to-day routine of the Hakkas, gender roles in multiple aspects, the rituals and ceremonies that serve as a form of obligation for the Hakka community, the role of the temple in the village, the political inclination of Hakka villagers, and the common stereotypes of the Hakkas.

In general, Chinese immigrants arrived in Malaysia in five major waves, with the most recent one being the fifth wave. According to Khoo (1998: 4), the major migration movement started in the middle of the 19th century, when local leaders of Malaya¹ were seeking methods on enhancing and fastening development of the area. This phenomenon encouraged massive amount of Chinese people to travel all the way from China, in hopes to secure a better job and future in the region.

It is explained that in the district of Larut-Kamunting, which appears to be one of the best districts for tin mining activities during the 1880s, the earliest groups of Hakka people to arrive were known as the Chen Sang and Fui Chiu. However, in the mid-1860s, due to ongoing conflict between both of these Hakka groups, the members of Fui Chiu decided to leave the country. In Sungai Ujong and the Klang Valley of

¹ The name that was used by Malaysia before gaining their independence from the British in 1957.

Selangor, the article mentions that Kah Ying Chiu was one of the Hakka groups that settled down and created a new life for themselves. It is important to note that with the increasing rise of modernization and industrialization, the demand for more labour increased steadily, and therefore inducing the migration of the Chinese people to Malaya.

According to Jackson (1964, as cited in Carstens, 1996: 138), the Hakka people made up 64 percent of the Chinese in Selangor and 71 percent in Kuala Lumpur. Ten years later, their numbers decreased significantly, representing only 34 percent of the Selangor Chinese population. Carstens (1996: 129) also explains that the Hakkas in the peninsular part of Malaysia were more likely to have lived in rural areas, which is directly connected to the occupation that they chose to take up during that time, which were manual labourers in tin mines and rubber plantations.

In Sabah on the other hand, it is stated that since there were no major attractions in Sabah such as the lavish tin and rubber sectors in the peninsular, most of the movements for Chinese immigrants were assisted by the state, and they were first recruited to work in tobacco companies that were newly built in the 1880s.

Apart from working in the tobacco industry, the Chinese immigrants who first arrived in Sabah also became traders and shopkeepers. However, as the number of rubber plantations in Sabah started to grow exponentially during the early 1900s, this situation attracted a massive wave of Chinese people and by 1931, their numbers grew to more than 50,000.

The immigration of the Chinese in Sarawak started earlier than in Sabah, and the numbers were visibly higher. Khoo (1998: 14) explains that when James Brooke

began his rule in 1841, there was only a small group of Chinese people who moved to Bau, in which gold and antimony were being extracted. In hopes of obtaining more Chinese labourers, Brooke made attractive offers of land to them, and this caused their numbers to increase significantly between the years of 1889 and 1911.

Interestingly, despite having the reputation of becoming the late comers when it comes to settling in Malaysia, the first group of Chinese settlers who arrived in 1889 happens to be of Hakka origin, and they were provided with 150 acres of land to plant paddy. After a while, these Hakka people refocused their attention to vegetable farming and animal breeding instead, as this was considered more lucrative.

Being considered as labourers, these Chinese immigrants had to go through a series of different hardships to build their new lives in Malaysia, and they were subjected to many terms and conditions. The article clarified that this was highly evident in the way that the agencies or the individuals that brought them to Malaysia treated them, as their working placements were located outside the urban development in order to keep them isolated from the larger community.

Another example that can be seen is in the ways these Chinese immigrants were called while they were working as labourers. They were called “coolies” and “piglets” at one point, and currently the former only serves as a degrading term to call Chinese or Indian people, which ignites a sense of racism and discrimination.

These Chinese labourers were bound by their contract with their respective agencies and employers, and they could only start living a decent life once their contract has ended. However, Khoo (1998: 17) reports that in some cases, although these Chinese labourers have already fulfilled their contract, their employers will try

to twist the terms and conditions of the contract, in order to manipulate the Chinese labourers into thinking that they were still in debt.

In short, these Chinese labourers were promised the opportunity to build a better life once they arrive in Malaysia, but most of them were often deceived and they end up working too long. Indirectly, the immigration movements of Chinese and Indian labourers into Malaysia have contributed to the founding of a plural society in Malaysia, and the article states that each group was compartmentalized according to their occupation.

For example, the Malays were located in areas where there were no major activities of mining and agriculture, the Chinese could be found in mining zones and plantations across the country while the Indians were largely situated in estates that were owned by the Europeans. This leaves little room for each group to mingle with one another, and the Chinese and Indian labourers had to succumb to a change in their culture, customs, and traditional practices, which became the first steps towards cultural assimilation.

2.2 New Chinese Villages (Resettlement Movement)

Due to a state of emergency that was proclaimed in Malaya on 16 June 1948, a resettlement of the people was conducted in order to fend off the communists. According to Sandhu (1973: 29), one of its effects is the shifting of 1,200,000 rural people into more than 600 “new” settlements, which have transformed the pattern of the Malayan population. Since land acquisition in Malaya favours the Malay people, many Chinese immigrants had to depend on the illegal action of “squatting”, which is the action of residing in a land illegally, without permission from the state or the law.

This is illustrated by Wang, Cheong and Li (2020: 5), who explain that although the villagers of a Hakka settlement have been living in the town of Mantin, Seremban for more than a century, they still did not possess any form of rights or titles to the land, and they were only given temporary occupation licences (TOLs) by the land office of Seremban, in which they were required to pay land tax.

However, recent developments have shown that the land that the Hakka villagers are living on has been purchased by a private company for the purpose of redevelopment, and therefore their status as being illegal squatters continues. Even in a map that was produced in November 2016 by the Malaysian Survey Department (*Jabatan Ukur Dan Pemetaan Malaysia – JUPEM*) shows that the Hakka village is no longer present on the map.

At present, the Hakka village is now demolished, along with traces of their Hakka heritage. Although some villagers tried to contest the developers in court, but due to the lack of ownership rights to the land, the Hakka villagers were defeated, and they were forced to evacuate the village that they have called home for many decades.

This phenomenon of illegal squatting became increasingly visible between the years 1940 – 1945 due to several factors: natural increase of the squatter population, illegal immigration during and after the Japanese Occupation, labourers moving away from mines and estates and the movement of urban dwellers who wish to reside in the countryside. After the surrender of the Japanese, many Chinese immigrants decided to move back to their homeland as situation improves, while others decided to stay put due to the establishment of economic opportunities such as vegetable cultivation and pig-rearing. (Sandhu, 1973: 43)

Sandhu (1973: 44) explains that one of these new settlements were the Hakka people residing in Pulai, Kelantan. Due to the resettlement plan, they were expelled from Kelantan and segregated to various detention camps around Malaya. They were relocated three times.

First, they were sent to Batu Rakit Village in Terengganu. Due to infertile land, they were relocated again to Pulai Baru (Gajah Mati) on 31 May 1953. When floods kept on recurring and they realized that the soil was not good, they were relocated one last time to Batu Lima New Village. Besides that, the Chinese immigrants were also subjected to labour segregation, in which the majority were sent to tin mines, and the rest to estate fields.

If a Chinese residing in these new settlements were asked about their ethnicity, they would reply either Hakka, Hokkien, Cantonese, or some other dialect group. Although they may not know their true origin or the original district from China, but normally they will identify with their father's dialect group.

Nyce (1973: 111) writes that the resettlement plan did not care for the dialect groupings of the Chinese immigrants, therefore each new settlement would have a mix of different dialect groups, and the division between them becomes less significant.

These new settlements often feature indiscriminate mixing, in which families of different dialect groups are neighboured together. This phenomenon is also known as dialect clustering. For example, the article recounts that a Hokkien widow found herself situated between a Cantonese family on one side, and a Hakka family on another side, and she was not able to speak with either of them due to the lack of a

common language. Therefore, although the gap between each dialect group is minimized, but close relationships were hardly forged in the beginning as they were not able to communicate with one another.

It is common to observe some typical stereotypes that are normally associated with each dialect group, which I argue can either be a positive or negative aspect. The article states that the Hakkas would normally perceive the Hokkiens as the ones who would run the businesses and shophouses, whereas the Hokkiens would identify the Hakkas as being labourers. To add to that, Hokkiens are often deemed as the more superior group when compared to the others, and this extends to many other economic activities as well.

In another example given by Nyce (1973: 113), in one of the many villages that was studied, the Hokkiens were the one who had the larger animal breeding business, defeating the Hakkas. However, it is important to note that the labour patterns and division differs from one Chinese village to another, and there is no consistent or persistent pattern. Hence, although the influence of traditional labour patterns can still be seen today, but it is not as apparent as before.

The article also explains about the political involvement of the people living in these new villages, and apparently the choice of political support is highly dependent on the labouring class of the villagers. For instance, the higher class of people (which consist of the landowners and business dwellers), would choose to support the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA), which is one of the three communal based parties. The labouring class of people would show their support for the opposing forces instead, which is known as the Socialist Front (SF).

In terms of the *lingua franca* in these new villages, it would be based on the dominant dialect group of that specific village. For example, it is stated that if a village has more Hokkien people when compared to the others, then the Hokkien dialect will be used more often in the everyday proceedings of the villagers. In this case, the Hakka people who resided in these villages would have to learn Hokkien as well, to ease the communication process between them and the other villagers. This is true for a community that is close-knit.

On the other hand, in a village where the main economic contribution comes from agricultural activities, Nyce (1973: 115) states that the villagers would not have much time for leisure activities after they finish working, which would discourage the people of one dialect group to communicate with another group, and this prevents a decent relationship to be formed. This would also lead to the villagers only knowing their own dialect, instead of talking to others and learn to speak the dialect of the other group.

It is interesting to note that when comparing men and women in terms of learning dialects, the men reign supreme as most of them would know how to speak more than two dialects. This is the result of the men being the ones who would frequent coffee shops and talk to other men from different dialect groups, and they were the ones who would go out of town more often, giving them the opportunity to pick up a different dialect during their travels. The women on the other hand, were expected to stay at home to execute domestic housework, and this is especially true in the Chinese community; except for the Hakka women, who would also work as labourers, on top of performing all their domestic duties.

2.3 Usage of the Hakka Dialect

Most research regarding the Hakka communities in Malaysia is based on the usage of the dialect, and how it has gradually declined over the years due to several factors. The most common factor is the rise in the usage of Mandarin as the main language being taught in educational institutions throughout the country, and this has caused a lot of Chinese people of different dialect groups to take up Mandarin, as it can also serve as a way of communication between them.

Besides that, people who speak Mandarin are perceived to be more knowledgeable and respected, hence more Hakka people (especially the younger generation), decide to choose Mandarin as their *lingua franca*.

According to Vollman and Tek (2018: 103), the rise of the usage of Mandarin in Malaysia is a direct result of the rise of Putonghua² in China, in which Chinese-medium schools in Malaysia were more than willing to absorb this language into the education system, which leads to the decrease usage of other dialects such as Hakka, Hokkien, Cantonese, and others.

For the Chinese people in Malaysia, their identity can be defined through several elements, and the article states that besides being identified through familial relations and ancestry, the Chinese people also identify themselves through the dialect that they use, their original province, and being a “Chinese Malaysian”. Therefore, to some Hakka people, speaking Hakka symbolizes the identity of the region, the kinship that they have with one another, and also the patrimony.

² Essentially, they are both the same language but are called different names. It is known as Mandarin in Malaysia, but as Putonghua in China.

Although different Chinese groups have their own unique dialect, but the writing system for each dialect remains the same, in which Chinese characters will be used when writing. Therefore, the same Chinese characters will be read differently by each dialect group, as the article demonstrates in the usage of the word 福源, which is read as “*Fu Yuan*” in Mandarin, “*Hock Guan*” in Hokkien, “*Fook Yun*” in Cantonese, and “*Fook Yen*” in Hakka.

At times, this can be a confusing process for the Chinese of different dialect groups to understand one another, since a term can be pronounced differently across various dialects. However, it is important to note that the Hakka that is being used in Malaysia, is different than the one being used in China, and the people’s attitude towards using the language or dialect can also serve as a point of interest.

The main visible difference between the Hakka used in Malaysia and China is the usage of loan words from English and Malay. Due to the multilingual aspect that is present in Malaysia, it is common to see words from different languages being borrowed between one another, especially when an individual knows more than two languages.

Vollman and Tek (2018: 106) gave several examples such as the word “*pandai*”, which translates to “smart” in English. The Hakka people took this word and pronounced it as “*ban nai*”, which carries the same meaning when conversing in Hakka.

Another example that was used is for the word “lockup”, which is pronounced as “*lokap*” by the Hakka speakers, and this word is also used in the Malay language to mean “prison” in English. Hence, it is evident that the Hakka dialect that is used in

Malaysia has created its own identity to become a version of Malaysian Hakka that is distinct than the one that is used in China.

Although the Hakka dialect in Malaysia has transformed into a form of identity for the Hakka community, it is not the preferred mode of communication among the younger generation, as they do not see the benefits in retaining the dialect in their everyday lives. This leads to another question; can one claim to be of a particular ethnic group if they do not speak the language or dialect?

According to Liao (2020: 159), the participants that were chosen for the study still claim to possess a strong sense of Hakka identity, even the ones who do not speak the dialect so often. Some young Hakka participants claim that the only reason that they speak Hakka was to respect their family's wishes, but if given a choice, Hakka would not be their first mode of communication. The article states that Hakka was perceived to be rude when used to communicate in a formal setting, therefore Mandarin reigns as the preferred choice.

However, when talking to their friends who can speak Hakka, it is easier to communicate using the dialect as it is perceived to be more friendly. This further proves that the Hakka community has a clear attitude towards each language and dialect, as Mandarin is used for education and formal occasions whereas Hakka is used when communicating at home or with friends.

It is interesting to note that the participants in another study conducted by Liao (2015: 119) also showed gender stereotypes in both of these dialects, in which Hakka is seen to be a more masculine dialect, whereas Mandarin is perceived to be more feminine. For example, one of the participants in this study states that when talking to

his significant other, he would converse in Mandarin as it is the more polite choice. However, when talking to his other male friends, he would switch back to using Hakka.

2.4 Rituals and Ceremonies

In a Hakka village in Sarawak, the villagers still adhere very closely to the rituals and ceremonies that they are obligated to carry out, especially for the Grave Sweeping Festival (also known as Ching Ming Jie - 清明節) and Hungry Ghost Month. According to Chai (2013: 3), these days of obligation, which is a platform for the living to pay respect to their ancestors, take place in a cemetery not far from their village, and it is a very important affair that must be done accordingly.

The ancestors that are more important are the ones who have just recently passed away, as the current generation would still have some memories of the deceased when they were still alive. According to the traditions of the Chinese, respect is paid to the deceased either individually during the date of their demise, or gathered as a collective, in which respect would be paid to them during major occasions, such as the ones mentioned above.

Unlike other dialect groups, the article mentions that the Hakkas do not keep the tablets of their ancestors in their homes, as this will cause a great deal of trouble to the host, who will be obliged to pay respect to the ancestors on the 1st and 15th of every month. Failure in doing so could result in the punishment of the host. Historically, the Hakka people are often migrating from one place to another, therefore it makes sense for them to abandon the teaching of keeping the ancestors' tablets in their homes, in order to travel lighter.

The Ghost Sweeping Festival normally falls between the first and the second week of the third month of the lunar calendar. Before the day of the festival, Chai (2013: 5) states that the family members would visit the graves of their ancestors and clean them up, and sometimes even paint the tombstones. On the day itself, food and drinks will be offered to the ancestors, and hell money will be burned for the ancestors to spend in the afterlife. At the end of the ceremony, everybody will return home and the food that was offered to their ancestors will be taken home too.

On the other hand, the Hungry Ghost Month takes place on the seventh month of the lunar calendar, and the ceremony falls on the 15th day of the month. During this month, the villagers believe that the gates of hell are opened, and the ghosts are free to roam around earth for an entire month.

This is considered an inauspicious month, due to the presence of these ghosts. In addition to that, the article mentions that among these ghosts, there are also hungry ghosts or wandering ghosts, who suffered from a tragic death during their time here on earth, and they roam around seeking for revenge or looking for another life to replace theirs. Therefore, the Chinese people do not make long journeys on the road during this period, and the younger generation is advised to stay home, especially at night.

For marriage ceremonies in this village in Sarawak, ancestry worship is also applicable. Since the children who are getting married are normally working elsewhere, the responsibility of preparing for the wedding falls onto the parents of the child, especially the mother and her other female relatives.

Chai (2013: 7) writes that as ancestor worship is a crucial component in the marriage rituals, any parents or young couple who chooses not to do it are often lectured by the village elders, as serious consequences might befall upon the newly wedded couple who did not go through the necessary procedure of the ritual.

During the day before the wedding, the ancestor worship is done at the bride's house, in which the chosen medium will start the ceremony by lighting up three pairs of red candles and a bundle of joss sticks, which will be continued with the chanting of the medium, to invite the ancestors of the lineage to appear in the ceremony.

In most cases, the article explains that the blessings for a good marriage, to protect the lineage, to possess good health, prosperity, and wealth are normally requested from the ancestors. At the end, paper money and incense are also burned, to thank the ancestors for coming to the ceremony.

On the day of the wedding, a ceremony is held at the groom's house instead, as the spirit medium invites the ancestor to come to the house of the groom. The article states that the full arrival of the ancestors is dependent on the tossing of the cup (杯 – bei), which is two silver ornaments that are tied together with a red string. If both sides of the ornaments are shown upwards, that means that all the ancestors have arrived, and the medium will invite them to feast on the food that is prepared.

Once the bride arrives, a series of different rituals will take place, such as bowing three times in front of the ancestor worship table, in which each bow is dedicated to the heaven and earth, the ancestors, and each other, respectively. The article states that after three empty glasses on a tray are handed over to the groom to

carry, the bride will symbolically present the tea-filled glasses to the ancestors, and she will receive a red packet after that. This process is repeated two more times.

After that is done, the couple will go into their room in which the groom will execute the unveiling of the bride. This will continue with the couple holding three joss sticks in their hands and performing another three bows in the living room, each bow for the heaven and earth, the ancestors, and the God of the Earth, also respectively. In the end, Chai (2013: 8) mentions that the medium will thank the ancestors for coming to the ceremony, and they will send them off their way.

Although the marriage rituals may seem like a lengthy process, but it is crucial that it is performed according to the necessary steps, as failure in doing so will result in serious consequences. For example, the article writes about an incident in which the ancestor worship was only done at the house of the bride, but the ceremony did not continue in the groom's house as he has already embraced Christianity instead.

A few days after that, strange things started to happen in the village, such as chickens dying mysteriously, the grandparents falling sick, and one of the grandchildren of the family started seeing "strange people" and playing with them. Upon realizing their mistake, the groom's family hastily picked a day to conduct the ancestor worship, and things started to go back to normal after that.

OLD	NEW	REASON
Wearing new wedding gowns that are not white in color	Wearing white wedding gowns, either bought or rented from a bridal shop	Wearing white wedding dress is a form of fashion trend / The increase of bridal shops to offer various options to the bride

Popular months to be married would be the 8 th and 12 th month of the lunar calendar (considered to be most auspicious)	Any other months besides the 3 rd , 6 th and 7 th month which are considered to be inauspicious	As a lot of young people are working abroad, it is very difficult for them to come back on the 12 th month as it coincides with the busiest time of the working year
The headgear that is worn by the bride will be taken off after the tea ceremony	The bride will continue wearing the headgear until the end of the ceremony	The parents and older relatives are too busy managing other activities / Not understanding the symbolic meaning of the headgear

Table 1.0: The differences between the old and new traditions and the reasons behind it.

Apart from that, Chai (2013: 11) also notes a few changes in the marriage rituals, as illustrated in the table above. It is argued that the main reasons causing all these changes to the old traditions are mostly due to the process of modernization, as the younger generation slowly detaches themselves from the obligations of performing these rituals and ceremonies, the less likely they are going to follow through for the future generations.

However, in this village of Sarawak, the villagers still try their hardest to comply to the procedures of the marriage rituals, especially among the elders. They also continue to practice this set of traditions because:

- It is a symbol of unifying ritual that bonds the family members together, and to ensure the protection of the family lineage.

- The fear of omitting these practices, as they believe that the spirits of the ancestors might come back to haunt and taunt them if the ritual is not performed accordingly.
- The presence of social stigma among the villagers, as others will start to bad mouth and talk negatively about the couple who fail to comply.
- The preparation needed to organize the rituals and ceremonies do not take a lot of money and effort, so the villagers would choose to just execute them.

2.5 Religious Responsibilities

In a different Hakka village that is located along the Kuching-Serian Highway in Sarawak, another form of a new village was also established, after the Hakka people were forced to resettle there.

According to Chai (2014: 3), this village was established during the 1960s, and the Hakka people who resided in this village are mostly farmers who are engaged in small scale agricultural activities. During the time of its establishment, the Hakka village was treated as a “controlled area”, because they were the main suspects for communist activities.

The villagers here have a unique form of religious belief, which is simply known as those who “pray to the gods” (拜神 – bai shen). The article explains that this is the dominant form of worship in the village, and it is most practiced by the Chinese people who lived in the area.

To carry out events of worship, the villagers would go to the local temple – the Tai Pak Kung temple, in which lies three deities of interesting persona: Tai Pak Kung

(which is a god of Chinese descent and origins), Datuk Kong (which is a localized god for the villagers), and Tai San Shin (which is also a localized belief that is the protector of the mountains and earth).



Figure 1.0: An image of the Tai Pak Kung temple.

Source: Chai, C. F. (2018). *Our Temple, Our Past: Memories of the Past and Social Identity of a Hakka Community in Sarawak*, Pg 11.

The Tai Pak Kung is a Chinese god that watches over five elements – gold, wood, water, fire, and earth. The article states that although the Hakkas identify this Chinese god as Tai Pak Kung, but other dialect groups have a different name for it. For example, the Hokkiens would call this god as Tua Pek Kong, whereas it is known as Fuk Teck Zhen Shin (福德正神), in Mandarin. In Sarawak, there are many other temples in other towns and cities that are built as a dedicated to the Tai Pak Kung.

It is important to note that the Tai Pak Kung temple for this village is located in their old settlement, before moving to this current village. Chai (2014: 13) notes that during the 1990s, the villagers suggested to move the Tai Pak Kung temple to their current village, but the operation did not go smoothly.

The deity, which is Tai Pak Kung, rejected the notion twice. According to the spirit medium that was appointed to help in this process, the Tai Pak Kung is a powerful god and does not wish to be shifted to a different location. Therefore, the Tai Pak Kung temple remains in the old settlement instead, which is about 4km away.

Another deity that is placed in the temple is Datuk Kong, who is believed to be a deity of Malay descent. According to the research of Tadao Sakai (1993, as cited in Chai, 2014: 16), it is mentioned that the Ta Po Kung (a different spelling of Tai Pak Kung), is often linked with another Malay deity, which is known as Datok (a different spelling of Datuk).

To further prove this, Chai (2014: 16) writes about an incident in the village, in which the spirit medium was scolded by Datuk Kong for always including pork in the temple offering. In the religion of Islam, eating pork is considered a forbidden act, and it is *haram* for practitioners to eat it.

However, it is important to note that the Malay deity that is being worshipped by the Hakka villagers does not belong to the Islam religion, as the Muslims only recognize one God, which is *Allah*. As the article puts it, the deity just happens to have Malay origins and attributes. Even in the depiction of Datuk Kong, he is seen donning a *songkok*, a long-sleeved collared shirt, and a *sampin*. These are all parts of the traditional attire of the Malay culture.



Figure 2.0: The statue of Datuk Kong.

Source: Chai, C. F. (2018). *Our Temple, Our Past: Memories of the Past and Social Identity of a Hakka Community in Sarawak*. Pg 28.

The third and last deity, which is commonly known by the villagers as Tai San Shin, is the god who guides over the mountains. The article explains that when one of the villagers gets lost while exploring the forest, it is believed that the evil spirits of the forest are the ones who are causing this commotion.

Therefore, the villager should seek out for the help of the Tai San Shin, and they would be guided through the forest safely. However, one should not perform any negative actions such as using foul words or urinating in the forest, as this will invoke anger of the Tai San Shin, and they would be punished for their indecent demeanour.

According to Chai (2014: 18), as migrants settled into a foreign land, they felt the need to ask for the protection of the local spirits or gods of their new settlements, although they have brought the belief of their own Chinese gods to their new homes.

This is the case of Datuk Kong and Tai San Shin, who are considered as local entities that are closely related to the natural form of their new settlements. This Hakka village in Sarawak has experienced a syncretisation of beliefs, by showing respect and worshipping a Chinese deity, a Malay deity, and a guardian of nature, which is also known as a form of polytheism.

In the Hakka village of Pulai, northern Kelantan, there is also an inclusion of various other deities that are specific to the village. Carstens (2007: 36) states that the first deity that is worshipped in this village is Guanyin, which is a common deity that is worshipped among the Hakka people, as well as the Chinese community. During the birthday of this Goddess of Mercy (which falls on the 19th day of the second lunar month, a celebration is held in which rituals and processions are executed to honour the spirit of Guanyin.

Apart from Guanyin, the next important deity that is worshipped in this village of Pulai is known as Maniang (媽娘) and it is represented as three sisters that are named Chen (陳), Lin (林), and Li (李). The article explains that these deities are seated on the right side of the Guanyin statue, and they play a crucial role of guarding the villagers against evil spirits.

Carstens (2007: 37) also explains about a more localized deity that is worshipped by the Pulai villagers, and she is known as Sukpotai (叔婆大), which is believed to have been summoned by the three sisters to take responsibility over the domestic animals of the village. It is stated that she likes to eat liver, hence anyone who would like to ask for her assistance would normally bring this treat as an offering for the deity.

In addition to that, there are four other male deities that are present in the temple, and they are known as Tangongye (譚公爺) – a deity responsible for rain, Guandi (關帝) – a deity who helped the villagers in resolving conflict, Dabogong (大伯公) – a deity that is considered as territorial and lastly, Caishen (財神) – a deity

in charge of wealth and fortune. All these deities are situated on the left side of the Guanyin statue.

Apart from all the aforementioned deities, there are also some special deities that are only summoned during major occasions such as Guanyin's birthday celebration, which are a local water spirit, as well as two territorial spirits known as Laduk (拿督公). It is believed that the Laduk spirit were of Malay descent who passed away in the village, and they were granted the title of spiritual landlord. During the celebration, vegetarian offerings are prepared for them.

There are also other smaller deities that are worshipped and only appear during special occasions, as Carstens (2007: 39) writes about local deities such as Jianjaiye (監齋爺) – a deity in charge of the vegetarian diet, Shen (神) – a deity who looks after the overall merriment, and Dajiangjun (大將軍) – a military deity.

Another major deity that is worshipped is known as the Jade Emperor, or Yuhuangdadi (玉皇大帝), who is positioned in front of a three-tiered altar that is located on the outside of the temple during the mornings of the 6th and 9th day of Guanyin's birthday celebration. It is believed that his power is on par with those of the Malay Sultan.

2.6 The Case of the Hakka Community in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2.6.1 Introduction

This part of the study is informed by Dr. Pek Wee Chuen, an assistant professor at the New Era University College, Kuala Lumpur, who specializes in Malaysia Regional Studies and Diasporic Chinese Studies. I was able to contact him

through his email and we managed to have an insightful discussion on 2 May 2022 regarding the Hakka community in Kuala Lumpur and their cultural connotations.

The following part will be divided into several subtopics, based on the interview that was conducted with Dr. Pek. Firstly, a brief history on the establishment of Kuala Lumpur will be discussed, as it is important to understand the initial conditions of the Hakka people in their new environment, followed by the art and culture of the Hakka community, and then festivals and rituals that are still being practiced in Kuala Lumpur.

It is then continued with a discussion regarding a localized cult, that serves as a form of syncretic religion for the Hakka people. After that, the role and history of the Hakka associations in Kuala Lumpur will be discussed as well, in which it highlights the interactions between larger associations and smaller ones.

Dr. Pek also explains about the usage of the Hakka dialect in Kuala Lumpur, and how it shows a promising rate of preservation, albeit being on a decline as well. And last but not least, information regarding the Hakka cuisines is also included in this part of the study.

It is informed that due to the degree of cultural assimilation that the Hakka community had to experience when they arrived in Kuala Lumpur, the cultural lines between the Hakkas and other Chinese ethnic groups are rather blurred as well, and most of them share the same cultural values and beliefs. This will be further discussed later.

2.6.2 Kuala Lumpur as a Hub for the Hakka People

During the 1850s, a large group of Chinese tin miners decided to settle down in the connecting area between the rivers of Klang and Gombak, which was a position of great strategy as it could receive the necessary supplies for the establishment of the city rather easily, and it also served as the transportation highway for the deliverance of tin. (Gullick, 1994, as cited in Giron, 2018: 1)

This new settlement was given the name of Kuala Lumpur, which loosely translates to “a muddy island or area”. Giron (2018: 1) explains that the settlement continued to grow rapidly, expanding its bases into nearby market towns in which became the trading spots for tin, before being transported to Klang and eventually, into the international market.

Due to the increased success of the settlement, greed and rivalry appeared among the clans that were formed in the area, which resulted in a chaotic environment during the time. However, the article explains that when Yap Ah Loy was chosen as the leader of the community in the settlement, or also known as the “Kapitan Cina”, the chaos started to dwindle down among the various clans.

Dr. Pek states that Yap Ah Loy was indeed, of Hakka descent, and he became one of the first prolific Hakka leaders in Malaysia, that would spearhead the development of Kuala Lumpur. It is also stated since Kuala Lumpur was the hotspot for tin mining sites, most of the people who mined in these sites were from the Hakka community.

Giron (2018: 1) continues to explain that Yap Ah Loy managed to create a powerful influence over the tin mines of Kuala Lumpur, and he was recognized as the

founding father of the once undeveloped state. However, the city of Kuala Lumpur was unfortunately caught in the Selangor Civil War from 1867 to 1873, due to the power struggle of controlling the tin mines in the area, and eventually the city came to its demise in 1872. Over the years, Yap Ah Loy managed to rebuild the city of Kuala Lumpur, and rising from the ashes, it has become the city that it is today.

According to Dr. Pek, even among the different Hakka groups in Kuala Lumpur, a rivalry commenced. Due to the unfair distribution of the earnings, Yap Ah Loy, who was the leader of the Fui Chiu clan, faced a serious disagreement with Zhong Chong, who was the leader of the Ka Ying Chiu clan. Eventually, Yap Ah Loy and his clan reigned supreme amidst this commotion, and Zhong Chong and his clan were forced to travel elsewhere in search of a tin mine that they could control and conquer.

Upon arriving to Malaysia, Dr. Pek explains that the term “Hakka” did not exist during the 19th century, and they called themselves “Khek” instead. Due to the existence of several Hakka clan associations, the Hakka community was not unified when they arrived in Kuala Lumpur, and they chose to segregate themselves according to their land of origin.

For example, if a Hakka person originated from the Meixian province of China, then they would come to Kuala Lumpur and look for other Hakka people who came from the same province. Therefore, the relationship between each clan was practically non-existent, and their differences will cause an extreme amount of tension from time to time.

However, Dr. Pek reveals that due to the occurrence of the Cultural Revolution³ in China, the overseas Chinese living in other parts of the world such as Malaysia, felt the need to be united under one umbrella, and thus the concept of the “Chinese” emerged. I argue that this could be one of the factors as to why the visibility of the Hakka people might have been diluted.

2.6.3 Art and Culture of the Hakka Community

According to my informant, one of the main items of art and culture that could be identified with the Hakka community is their mountain songs. Bian and Pikulsri (2020: 45) explain that it is a form of song that is sung by the Hakka people while they are working hard in the mountains, or these songs could also be used to express their feelings to one another. It serves as a form of oral literature that belongs to the Hakka community, and it certainly can be observed as a valuable cultural resource.

In recent years, Magnum – an expert in the gaming industry in Malaysia, has organized large scale singing competitions that require the participants to sing songs in Hakka or Hokkien. Back in 2016, selection rounds were made across four different states – Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Pahang, and Penang, in hopes to find talented participants who could stand a chance to win a portion of the RM40,000 that will be given away.

Although the songs that are featured in competitions as such may not be the same as traditional Hakka mountain songs, but Dr. Pek is relieved that at least there are still some effort being made to ensure the continuity of Hakka culture, although through modern Hakka songs. This could also motivate younger Hakka people to pick

³ A socio-political movement that was launched in China by Mao Zedong from 1966 to 1976, aimed at preserving the concept of Chinese Communism, as well as Chinese traditional elements.

up the dialect as well, as they try their best to bag a prize in the Hakka singing competitions in Kuala Lumpur.

Another thing that was mentioned is that the Hakka people were very interested in Kung Fu, which is a form of Chinese martial arts, that is also known as Wushu and Quanfa. But as the years passed by, not a lot of Hakka people continued to learn Kung Fu, and therefore it did not become a concrete form of art and culture for the Hakka people in Kuala Lumpur.

Apart from that, Dr. Pek explains that the Hakka community has their own version of a Lion Dance, which is slightly different than the ones that are commonly seen during major celebrations such as Chinese New Year. Trieste (2019: para. 4) reports that the headgears that are used in the Hakka Lion Dance are rounder in shape, and they have rectangular jaws.

The article also states that the Hakka-style lions can weigh up to 30kg, and therefore there are not many leaps and turns during the performance. Dr. Pek states that the Hakka version of the Lion Dance is inspired by a mythical creature of Chinese mythology – Qilin, and according to the Hakka Affairs Council website (2021: para. 3), one of the main elements of the Hakka Lion Dance is the inclusion of two characters, which are known as Big Face and Little Face.

The Hakka Lion Dance requires the performers to be well versed in multiple aspects, as both strength and agility is required when manning these performances. Not only do the performers have to possess good coordination with the music, but they also have to have some background in martial arts to successfully manoeuvre these lions.

Unfortunately, Dr. Pek explains that this form of art is very rare in Kuala Lumpur (and also the rest of Malaysia), and not many people know about its existence. Apart from the occasional activities that are being held by the Hakka associations around Kuala Lumpur, there are not many opportunities for the Hakka art and culture to shine.

My informant explains that there is no specific traditional dance that can accompany the identity of the Hakka people; although sometimes, the choir team of the Hakka associations would have the opportunity to sing and perform, and some generic dance movements will accompany the songs. Therefore, this cannot be considered as a Hakka-centric dance performance, as the origins of the movements do not come from a Hakka background.



Figure 3.0: The Hakka version of the Lion Dance, featuring a unique lion head.

(Source:

<https://english.hakka.gov.tw/Content/Content?NodeID=684&PageID=43496>,

accessed on 18 June 2022)

2.6.4 Tian Chuan Re (天穿日) – Sky Mending Day

One of the festivals that are celebrated among the Hakka community in Kuala Lumpur is Tian Chuan Re (天穿日), or loosely translated to “Sky Mending Day” or “Sky Patching Day”. Dr. Pek explains that the Hakka people believe that during this day, a hole is made in the sky and therefore a celebration must be conducted to mend or patch that hole.

According to Bong (2020: para. 1), this festival falls on the 20th day of the first lunar month of the Chinese calendar, and it is supposed to be a day of rest for the Hakka people. Traditional beliefs tell us that a fight commenced between the God of Water and the God of Fire, and when the former lost the battle, he banged his head against one of the pillars that was sustaining heaven, which resulted in the collapse of the pillar and heaven cracked open.

With the existence of the large hole, a variety of disasters were said to have happened, such as torrential rain and fire. The article explains that Goddess Nuwa came to the rescue and with the help of some colourful fire stones, she was able to mend the sky and put an end to the disasters that were happening on earth, bringing stability into the people’s lives.

Informed by this belief, the Hakka people would celebrate Tian Chuan Re to commemorate the good deed of Goddess Nuwa, and they would not conduct any work on that day, as the hole in the sky would just ruin all the work that they have done for the day. It is believed that this is the time for the earth and its people to take a break.

According to the article, the activities that occur during this festival include performing worship at the temples and also singing Hakka folk songs as a collective. Another popular activity is the consumption of the glutinous rice cakes, which acts as a symbolic meaning of mending and patching up the sky.

Dr. Pek explains that within the Hakka community in Kuala Lumpur, there are no large-scale events that are being done to commemorate the Tian Chuan Re, however a lot of the older Hakka generation still hold this belief close to their hearts, and celebrations of tinier scale are normally conducted in their respective homes.

2.6.5 Xian Shiye Cult

Within the Hakka community in Kuala Lumpur, a religious cult had emerged which has become one of the many actors in the religions that are practice by the Hakka people. Dr. Pek explains that this cult was motivated by the death of Yap Ah Loy's headman, who died in the battle with the clan of Zhong Chong.

Saddened by his death, Yap Ah Loy believed that the spirit of his trusted headman would still be able to help his clan members to win the battle, and his thoughts proved to be fruitful. Therefore, a temple was built in his honour to commemorate his contribution as the trusted headman.

According to Voon, Ee and Lee (2014: 38), the name of the headman is Sheng Ming Li, who was a Hakka who migrated from Huizhou, China to Malacca, Malaysia in 1851, before settling down in Sungai Ujong, which forms a part of modern-day Negeri Sembilan. As the leader and Kapitan of the Chinese community of largely Hakka miners, his death impacted the lives of his counterparts rather significantly.

Originating in the Qian Gu temple of Seremban, the cult of Xian Shiye has managed to disperse to many other areas, encompassing five different states. The articles explain that there are now at least 24 temples in which the worship of Xian Shiye is currently active, and the dispersion of the cult can serve as evidence that worshipping male figures can hold a certain power and influence in the community, especially to confer benefits.

In 1864, Yap Ah Loy was entrusted with a portion of Sheng Ming Li's ashes, and it was brought from Qian Gu temple of Seremban to consecrate the establishment of the new Xian Shiye temple in Kuala Lumpur. Being a devoted leader of the Huizhou Hakkas and Hai Shan Society, the articles state that Yap Ah Loy had the desire to uplift the veneration of his headman in order to unify the Hakka people in the area and also to strengthen the position of the Hai Shan Society.

Looking from the perspective of the societies, Sheng Ming Li was observed as the perfect example of a human being with a high sense of moral values and righteousness, and therefore he was highly respected among the members of the societies. The article also explains that this also becomes the perfect opportunity for the unification of the Hakka people, in an attempt to protect their lives and belongings, as well as to ensure their commitment in the development of the new settlement, which is modern-day Kuala Lumpur.

The temple was located in a busy area of Kuala Lumpur, and it happens to be one of the first ones that was built along with the settlement. Voon, Ee and Lee (2004: 56) state that after Kuala Lumpur was able to regain some peace from local rivalry, Yap Ah Loy supervised the re-building process of the temple in 1875, and it

continued to be a cultural emblem for the settlement's Chinese community, especially among the Hakka miners.

Other than that, the temple also served as a place for the contentment of one's spirits, as the articles explain that most of the Hakka people were hard workers in labour situations, and therefore they can sometimes experience loneliness and spiritual emptiness. Therefore, the temple was one of the platforms that these Hakka workers could connect with their spirituality, as well as to combat the tiring feeling of constant solitude.

Apart from the Da Bagong cult that is accustomed to residents or villagers of a specific location, the Xian Shiye cult has also a large presence in the community of the Chinese people in Kuala Lumpur, evidently through the number of temples that are dispersed through several states. The articles explain that the temples that implore this religious practice are often the first ones to be found in their vicinity, and it is seen as a threshold for early development.

Although the cult holds a special place in the hearts of the Hakka community, the religious influence has since spread to other Chinese ethnic groups as well, taking its place as a form of Chinese cultural heritage in Kuala Lumpur. These temples are often common gathering places for people to conduct worship and prayers, as well as to celebrate important occasions to appease the local deities of their beliefs.

Being the group that pioneered the development of the tin mining industries in various cities, the Hakkas had to go through so much in order to live a pleasant life. Among them are the power struggles that happened between them and the Malay

chiefs, and also the fear of settling into a new land in which they had to adapt to new and maybe foreign circumstances.

Therefore, the articles reiterated that the temple and the Xian Shiye cult served as a symbol of protection for the Hakka people, as well as other Chinese immigrants who have chosen to settle down in Kuala Lumpur, and who have taken it upon themselves to also establish other temples in honour of this religious practice.

“Like other religious cults, the Xian Shiye cult is essentially localized and its diffusion is regional rather than national.” (Voon, Ee and Lee, 2014: 56)

Based on the fact that the cult was able to live on from generation to generation for more than a century now, it is prominent that the Xian Shiye cult has deserved its place among the overseas Hakka community in Kuala Lumpur. The number of existing temples in the network of the Xian Shiye cult will ensure its continuity for the future generations.

Dr. Pek explains that it is quite impossible to pinpoint the main religious practice that reigns supreme among the Hakka communities in Kuala Lumpur, as he also believes that a syncretic form of religion is at play here. Furthermore, it is also observed that ancestral worship forms the base of these different religious practices.



Figure 4.0: The interior of a temple dedicated to the religious practice of the Xian Shiye.

(Source: <https://my.72dragon.com/1086/xian-si-shi-ye-gong-kuala-lumpur/>, accessed on 25 May 2022)

2.6.6 The Formation of Hakka Associations

The Hakka associations in Malaysia were one of the first associations that were catered to the Chinese ethnic groups, as the Hakka people found the need to create a strong front among the local people in their new settlements, and Dr. Pek mentions that one of the first clans that established an association were of the Fui Chiu and Ka Ying Chiu clan.

Before officially being called a proper association, these groups were simply known as “*kongsi*”, and it was used to segregate Hakka people into different working units. As Carstens (1996: 134) explains, members of the *kongsi* have a strong working

bond with each other, venturing into economic operations and vowing their commitment into this created brotherhood, and that they even had a major gathering every year.

From the aspect of its segregation, the article states that the Hakka miners were grouped together according to their area of origin in China, and that the officials that represented each group would be chosen by their shareholders instead of by the members' choosing. At times, this can lead to unwanted conflict among the members.

According to Jackson (1970, as cited in Carstens, 1996: 138), these different groups are often in competition with one another, as they try to seize control over the water and mining sites, and larger groups of the *kongsi* were capable of diminishing the smaller ones, or even get rid of them all together.

Heidhues (1993, as cited in Carstens, 1996: 135) explains that this pattern of Hakka fighting against other groups of Hakka were often occurring in tin mining sites around the Malay Peninsula, and with time, the inequalities among the members and shareholders grew.

Dr. Pek continues by explaining that this has become the basis of the formation of the Hakka associations, therefore at the beginning, the associations were also established based on the area of origin of the Hakka people. In Kuala Lumpur alone, there are a handful of Hakka associations scattered around Chinese-centric areas across the city and the outskirts.

Among them are the Hakka Association of Kepong, Choong Yoen Lian Ngi Hakka Association, the Hakka Association of Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, Fui Chiu Hakka Association, Ka Ying Hakka Association, and many others. In order to ease

cooperation between all these associations, a larger network known as *Persekutuan Persatuan-Persatuan Hakka Malaysia* (The Federation of Hakka Associations of Malaysia) was established.

According to Dr. Pek, when viewed through the perspective of power and influence, the smaller associations had a bigger impact on the community, and although the Federation of Hakka Associations of Malaysia is perceived as the championing power, but their focus is to unite the different Hakka associations and to provide them with support when necessary. The federation also proves to have a higher online presence, as they own a dedicated website, which makes them more accessible to the public.



Figure 5.0: Main Building of the Federation of Hakka Associations of Malaysia.

(Source:

<https://hmhistory.gbs2u.com/bd/index3.asp?userid=40554060&idno=2#vision>,

accessed on 15 June 2022)

2.6.7 The Presence of the Hakka Dialect

In Kuala Lumpur, there are still quite a number of Hakka people who are able to speak Hakka and are using the dialect in their everyday lifestyle. Although it has seen a decline in recent years, especially with the decreasing interest shown by the younger generation of the Hakka people, but there is still a large group of people who practices the dialect, especially among the older generation.

According to Dr. Pek, he believes that there is still a high concentration of people who can speak Hakka in areas such as Kepong and Kajang, and most of the Hakka people who are 35 years old and above can communicate in the dialect effectively. The younger group of the Hakka community are split in the middle, with half of them still knowing the dialect and the other half not being able to converse in Hakka.

Based on the small focus group that was organized, I agree with the sentiment given by Dr. Pek, as most of the participants from Malaysia were still able to speak the dialect. One of them even tried to speak in Hakka throughout the first few minutes of the session, as she was trying to engage with the others and observing whether they could converse in Hakka as well. This proves true for the older group of the Hakka population.

The younger group on the other hand could either partly speak the Hakka dialect, or they did not know how to speak at all. On a positive note, most of them were still able to understand the dialect when their parents tried to communicate with them in Hakka, but they did not learn the dialect enough to give their responses in Hakka.

Dr. Pek explains that when the younger generation have had the opportunity to spend more time with their grandparents, such as staying with them over the school holidays, he finds that the younger people were able to converse better in Hakka, as they had no choice but to learn the dialect if they wish to communicate with their grandparents.

2.6.8 Hakka Food Culture

In Kuala Lumpur, one of the more famous Hakka cuisines is the *Lei Cha*, which is a form of pounded tea that originated from the province of Hepo, China. Dr. Pek explains that this tea is quite popular among the Hakka community, and it remains as one of the staples for many Hakka households living in Kuala Lumpur.

Harmayani et. al. (2019: 11) explain that this tea is sometimes known as “thunder tea”, due to the loud noise that is made when pounding the ingredients, and a mixture of green tea powder and different herbs come together to become a soup, which is then served along with rice and other vegetables such as pickled radish and long beans.

Possessing a fragrant aroma and refreshing taste, the *Lei Cha* is believed to help expel the body of heat, and also to improve the detoxification of the liver, which eventually results in the longevity of the body. It is also used to treat flatulence and gives aid in the delivery process of new-born babies.

Another common Hakka delicacy that can be found is stuffed tofu, or also known as Yong Tau Foo. Liao & He (2018: 8) explain that this dish is very symbolic of the Hakka food culture, as it is the type of dish that played a huge role in ensuring

that there is a high-quality supply of protein for the Hakka people. It is also representative of the cohesion of the family.

The appearance of the Yong Tau Foo is testament to the ever-changing needs of the Hakka people who used to migrate at a regular basis. The articles explain that the Hakka people were required to constantly adapting their dietary needs when migrating, and the Yong Tau Foo was one of the dishes that could last for a long period of time.

Interestingly, the term “Yong Tau Foo” has somewhat evolved in terms of its usage, as local food courts (especially in shopping malls) would use this term to describe a different type of food preparation. At times, the term is not used to describe the stuffed tofu dish, but instead it is described as an assortment of different eatables such as fish cakes and fish balls that are cooked in a clear soup. Perhaps, this is a form of assimilation of the term that is used, but definitely not the dish or cuisine itself.

Another food culture that made its way into part of the Hakka food culture is the Yee Sang, which is a dish that consists of various ingredients, the most important one being a source of raw fish such as salmon. According to the Ministry of Tourism and Culture of Malaysia, the term “Yee Sang” brings the meaning of raw fish in the Cantonese dialect.

Some of the other ingredients include finely shredded carrots, white radish, preserved winter melon, pickled cucumber, pomelo pulps, fresh and pickled ginger, coriander leaves, crispy crackers, and roasted peanuts. It is believed that the higher number of ingredients included, the higher amount of prosperity will be granted to the consumers.

Dr. Pek explains that although this dish did not specifically belong to the Hakka people when they first arrived in Kuala Lumpur, but with the rising trend of tossing the Yee Sang during the Chinese New Year festivities, it has managed to become one of the dishes that are prepared by the Hakka people as well.

Other popular Hakka dishes in Kuala Lumpur include braised pork belly, Hakka mee and many others. It is evident that the Hakka food culture is still quite strong and prominent among the Hakka people, as well as other ethnic groups as well. There are also a large number of Hakka restaurants that are located sporadically across Kuala Lumpur.

2.7 Conclusion

In short, the Hakka community in Malaysia has gone through a process of cultural assimilation, as they were required to adapt to the current needs of the local areas that they decided to settle down in. In this case, the cultural assimilation of the Hakka community in Kuala Lumpur occurs more frequently with other Chinese ethnic groups, with a little bit of interaction with the local Malays.

The forms of culture that the Hakka people have and still hold on to are the usage of the Hakka dialect (although it seems like there is a decreased usage among younger Hakka people), the rituals and ceremonies that they celebrate in the local temples, and the unique form of religion that they possess (which includes local deities and guardians of nature).

Cultural connotations of the Hakka community are also observed through the roles of the Hakka associations, the visibility of the Hakka food culture, as well as the art and culture of the Hakka community in their new settlements.

CHAPTER 3: AN OVERVIEW OF THE HAKKA COMMUNITY IN THAILAND AND THE CASE OF BANGKOK

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, information regarding several aspects of the Hakka community in Thailand will be gathered and discussed, such as the construction and crisis of identity of the Hakka people, the role of various movements, language awareness among the community, places of worship and architectural elements, political leaders of Hakka descent and more.

Apart from that, a brief section highlighting the history of the Hakka people's migration to Thailand will be included as well, in order to understand the condition of ground zero for these immigrants and the circumstances that they had to face to create a new life in a foreign land. This may have forced them to rethink their identity and image as Hakka people.

3.2 The Migration of the Hakka People to Thailand

Marot (2020: 2) explains that throughout the years, Thailand has experienced several waves of Hakka migration, which resulted in the Hakka community representing 13.7 percent of the total Chinese population in Thailand in 1909. Most of the Hakka people were located in the southern parts of Thailand, Hatyai and Bentong.

According to an article by Wang (2017: 8), one of the factors that attracted many Chinese immigrants to settle down in Thailand is due to the construction of the railways as a means of national economic development during the reign of King Rama V. Due to the amount of manpower needed to realize the aspirations of the king

to build a railway system, a large number of laborers were needed and this opportunity enticed the Chinese people.

The article also mentions that due to some cases of political unrest that occurred quite frequently in Thailand, a large number of the Hakka people made their way to Malaysia, and many of them decided to cross over the Malaysia-Thailand border to work in southern Thailand, including Betong and Hatyai. However, the Hakka people continued to travel all throughout the nation, as the article states that the distribution of the Hakka people is quite fragmented, with Bangkok being the centre of the metropolis region. Even here, we can observe that the Hakka people continued to be nomadic instead of settling in a specific area.

One of the major ethnic minorities in Thailand is the Chinese people, in which they account for about 14 percent of the Thai population. And of the percentage, the article confirms that 16 percent of the Chinese minority is the Hakka people. This information is also confirmed by an article written Dosaphol Chansiri (2008, as cited in Wang, 2017: 8), one of the few scholars who studied the Hakka people in Thailand. The identity of the Hakka community is a construction that is based on transnationalism, resulting from the ongoing negotiation that is happening between China, Taiwan, and Thailand.

Due to certain factors, these migrants were compelled to reimagine their identities, challenge the traditional Hakka discourses, and put more focus on contemporary Hakka issues that have or may arise in the future. Since most countries in the world have succumbed to leading the country as “nation-states”, the article explains that a lot of minority groups were forced to re-evaluate and reconsider their

cultural identity, historical heritages, and ethnic cultures, to make way for a uniting “national culture” that is supposed to benefit all citizens of Thailand, which was made possible through the efforts of King Rama V, who wanted to construct a Siamese identity that was stronger and more powerful.

Not long after, the article explains that Phibun Songkhram, who was one of Thailand’s former prime ministers, executed various cultural policies to establish a new nation-state, which included redefining national cultures and lifestyles, transforming the name of Siam to Thailand, introduced a new concept for the term “Thai people” by including the minority groups from all over the nation, and the promotion of the Thai language.

“In addition, the government also implemented anti-Chinese culture policies such as restricting the Chinese language education, arresting the staffs in Chinese schools, and closing Chinese schools; which caused a panic among the Chinese people in Thailand at the time.” (Lee, as cited in Wang, 2017: 5)

Under its anti-communism policy, Thailand cut off all relationship ties with China in 1949. However, in 1961, Wang (2017: 5) states that the government made a U-turn on its decision to attract more investments from Taiwan, and the inclusion of Chinese language education in several schools were also added into the decision, and finally in 1975, Thailand re-established their relationship with China and the Mandarin language started to gain traction.

Although it seems like the Thai government is starting to give way for the Chinese migrants to have a good life in Thailand, they then produced an announcement regarding the ethnic and minority groups in the nation, in which they

were allowed to maintain their cultures, but they would not be given any support or assistance by the Thai government. This could be one of the main factors as to why the Hakka people were willing to assimilate with the local culture of the Thai people, as they were worried about not getting any support or assistance, especially being in a new and foreign land.

“The majority of the Chinese immigrant descendants had merged with the Thai society to such an extent that the successive generations would become indistinguishable from the indigenous population.” (Skinner, as cited in Wang, 2017: 5)

At this current era, the articles explains that many of the Chinese people are the third or fourth generation descendants who may have lost their native tongue and also cultural identity. According to Disaphol Chansiri (2008, as cited in Wang, 2017: 5), who tested the Skinner model in 2008, it is stated that the model is still relevant in today’s Chinese community, as only one percent still uses one of the Chinese dialects with their family members, whereas 85 percent preferred to use Thai as their main language and the remaining people chose to utilize both languages in their daily life.

When interviewed about the identity that the participants chose to acknowledge, only 18 percent claimed that they are still of the Chinese culture, whereas 64 percent identified with the Thai culture instead. The remaining ones chose to identify with both cultures. It is observed that numerous participants felt that the Chinese people in Thailand have merged quite well with the local people, and they should not be labelled as a “minority” due to their strong economic position, as reported by G. William Skinner (as cited in Wang, 2017: 5)

Although the Hakkas may seem to be “invisible” among the vast majority of the Thai people, but as Vorasakdi Mahatdhanobol (2001, as cited in Wang, 2017: 6), writer of the article entitled “*Keu Hakka Keu Chin Kea*” pointed out, the desire to identify with the Hakka culture and identity is still embedded in the hearts of the Hakkas, and this also becomes more prominent with the establishment of the Hakka associations in Bangkok and all over Thailand. Therefore, these scholars have concluded that the Hakka people managed to retain both identities – Hakka and Thai.

3.3 The Hakka People in the Former Capital City: Ayutthaya

According to Tsung-Rong (2005: 2), the Hakka people were considered an invisible group in Thailand after the assimilation policy towards the Chinese people was adopted in 1932. With the new practice of assimilation, a lot of the Hakka people lost the language of their ancestors and also practices of culture. In this article, it is observed that the focus of Chinese memory in Thai history can be observed in the city of Ayutthaya, which was the former capital city of Thailand before Bangkok.

The article states that the city of Ayutthaya was established by Chinese merchants in the 14th century, and it was called “*da cheng*” by the Chinese people, which is translated to “the big city”. It was also here that the former Thai king (who had Chinese blood) managed to defeat the Burmese enemy. However, due to the war between the Siamese and Burmese, the city of Ayutthaya was inevitably destroyed, and thus the capital city shifted to Thonburi, before moving to Bangkok in 1782. In the late 19th century, the city was rebuilt, and a small group of ethnic Chinese people migrated to the city and started settling down.

In Ayutthaya, Tsung-Rong (2005: 8) states that the areas with Chinese-centric people are the old streets in Huaro Market and Chao Phrom Market, where a lot of the shops are run by Hakka people (which is interesting to note since in Malaysia, the Hakka people do not dwell in the business of shopkeeping).

Apart from that, Naresuan Street has also become a business-centric area, in which a lot of the shops are also owned by Hakka people, and the two main families who live in this area are the Liang and Wen family. There are several clothing stores and gold shops located in this area as well.

The first migrant of the Wen family is Wen Chao Wen, who ran a clothing store in Ayutthaya when he first arrived. Currently, the Wen family has two clothing stores under their names, which are known as “*Weinan*” and “*Jinnan*”. Another family member, Wen Kai Huo, came to Ayutthaya after his father (who worked as a labourer) persuaded him to do so.

He started working in a dressmaker’s store and eventually, he established his own clothing store. Currently, he has become an integral part of the Hakka association in Ayutthaya, and he is perceived as one of the core people when it comes to cultural resources of the Hakka people. The article explains that the Wen family has run these clothing stores for more than 70 years, and the whole process has gone through three different generations to date.

On the other hand, Liang Yuyuan (the first representative of the Liang family) came to Ayutthaya to escape the political unrest that was happening in this hometown in China, and he conceptualized his own business of selling gold. The Liang family has a strict principle that only allows their family lineage to marry with a person who

also possesses the Hakka descent, in order to maintain the inheritance of the family business.

Tsung-Rong (2005: 11) mentions that this is also motivated by the dominance of the Hakka people over the gold business in Ayutthaya, and the Liang family wants to maintain that for the future. Apart from selling gold, some members of the Liang family are also owners of their own businesses, such as selling Chinese porcelain antiques and running a hotel.

In the process of remembering their past, the two families have different approaches, as stated in the article. Wen Kaihou of the Wen family tries to do so by teaching the younger generation the art of practicing and singing Hakka children folk rhymes whereas the Liang family chooses to send their children to China to learn Mandarin, or Putonghua.

However, the efforts made by the Liang family is questioned, as Mandarin and Putonghua do not necessarily connect with the culture of the Hakka people. Instead, the children of the Liang family should be learning the Hakka dialect instead, which is more identified with the Hakka culture.

Both of these families are actively involved in the activities organized by the Hakka association in the area. Being a smaller ethnic group, a lot of the Hakka people might choose to hide their ethnic identity, and instead they prefer to identify with other Chinese ethnic groups who are more dominant. However, the article points out that recent efforts shown by the Hakka association proves that the Hakka people are trying to relinquish their memories and rebuild their Hakka identity.

Zhang and Wongsurawat (2019: 52) explains further that the first clan-based association that was established in Siam belonged to the Hakka people, due to the small number of their ethnic group, which made it more crucial for them to have an association which could provide support to its people. Therefore, the first Hakka Association was registered in 1927, which marked an important moment for the Hakka community, as the association could now play the role of uniting the Hakka people.

Over the years, the articles states that more clan-based associations were registered, and at times these associations would work together to achieve a common goal, such as the Xu Clan Association of Thailand and the Hakka Association of Thailand, as their activities would sometimes overlap and require them to collaborate with each other. However, is this enough to serve as a preservation method for the Hakka identity?

3.4 The Approach of Phibun Songkhram and Identity Building

According to Kittitornsakul (2021: 161), prime minister Phibun Songkhram tried to foster a nationalist approach regarding economic policies towards the ethnic Chinese population in Thailand during the 1940s. As an example, the Chinese people who were in charge of the rice trading industry in the nation, were deliberately forced by the government to sell their businesses, which caused disruption in the lives of the Chinese population.

According to Songprasert (1976, as cited in Kittitornsakul, 2021: 162) even certain occupations such as fishing and serving the government were forbidden for the Chinese population, and since they were labelled as "dangerous" by the Thai

government at the time, the Chinese were compared with the Jews in Europe, and the colleague of prime minister Phibun Songkhram suggested that they should be treated the same way as Hitler treated the Jews, which is deemed as a cruel act.

Although Phibun Songkhram did not go to that extent, but in order to curb the cultivation of patriotism towards China and antagonism towards Japan, the Thai government took the initiative to shut down and ban all Chinese newspapers in the nation, in hopes that the Chinese population would not be influenced negatively.

It is prominent that the Chinese people were given a bad reputation due to the rise of communism during the period of the Cold War, and the article explains that this caused many Chinese individuals to go through an identity crisis.

In Chiang Mai, the Chinese association known as “*Angyii*” (which was founded by the overseas Chinese to render support to one another) was disbanded by the Thai government, and Chinese schools were closely observed as they were suspected of being allies of the association. All these movements caused a ruckus in the lives of the Chinese living in Chiang Mai.

However, things started to turn around from 1993 onwards, as the Cultural Revolution in China had ended and the economic growth of China gradually increased. Because of that, Kittitornsakul (2021: 163) finds that the Chinese started to reveal their cultural identity instead of hiding it, as they became more successful in the realms of business, bureaucracy, and politics. Since the Hakka communities in Thailand identify with the larger umbrella of the Chinese population, it can be assumed that this is pointing out to the Hakka people as well.

What are the elements that can highlight the Hakka-ness of an individual, or in other words, what makes a Hakka person? Chong (2018: 5) explains that one's identity is comparable to a child's school uniform, in which an individual is given the freedom to “put on” or “put off” their identity when it comes to certain circumstances. Therefore, some Hakka people is proud to identify themselves as being Hakka, whereas others feel ashamed as the term can sometimes lead to negative stereotyping connotations.

According to an old Hakka saying, which translates to “acknowledge your dialect, not your surname”, the article observes that the Hakka people used their language as a tool of separating the Hakka people from the other Chinese ethnic groups, although they may all share the same cultural values. Therefore, according to Hakka beliefs, the Hakka dialect may be one of the main elements that could prove that an individual can identify as a Hakka or not.

Another element that can serve as an indicator is the way that the Hakka buildings are established. The buildings that are built by the Hakka people try to adhere closely to the Confucian principles of fengshui, in which the buildings or houses should be built based on the anatomy of the human body.

For example, Chong (2018: 6) explains that the outdoor courtyard of a building can be understood as being the “mouth” of a person, and since the mouth is used to express one's thoughts and ideas, the outdoor courtyard uses the same concept and allows people to exchange ideas and to have effective communication with one another.

A lot of Hakka descendants do not understand the need to preserve the Hakka culture, while others are trying to redefine what it means to be a Hakka. When asked about adhering to a Confucian culture, some Hakka would say that it is just hocus pocus, while other view it as belonging to the Chinese people in general and all of them should try to adhere to it. Therefore, the article points out that identity and/ or culture is relative to the individual, and there is no “one-size-fits-all” formula that could fully represent the identity and/or culture.

However, Wang (2017, as cited in Chong, 2018: 9) states that the identity of the Hakka should not be solely based on the ability to speak the Hakka dialect, and its identity should be rooted from the Hakka spirit, which includes the people's freedom, their efforts to work hard and their perspective on education. The article argues that since identity is subjected to one's personal experience, therefore the Hakka identity can be described as being malleable and relative, as the Hakkas refuse to be subjected to what the outsiders think of them.

I am inclined to agree with this statement, as identity is definitely something that is constantly changing, especially during these times in which the traditional and the modern are always negotiating with one another. At the core of it, the identity of a community or a group of people needs to have and share the same values, as it creates the base and the foundation. However, how each person of that community or group decides to interpret and “wear” their identity is solely up to their preferences, and this creates an interesting phenomenon to observe.

3.5 The State of the Hakka Community

Wang (2017: 9) discovered that the Thai society only perceive the Chinese as being one group, instead of paying attention to the different ethnic group that exists within this framework, and the Chaozhou people (who accounts for fifty-six percent of the Chinese population) are often regarded as the main representative for this community, which stirs up a sense of inequality.

The Hakkas are almost invisible among the people in Thailand, and one of the root causes of this is because the cultural differences between the Hakkas, the Chaozhouese, and the Cantonese are always centred around their cuisines, languages/ dialects, and lifestyles, instead of putting attention to the arts or literature of these different ethnic groups. Apart from that, due to the strong assimilation policy that was carried out by the Thai government, a lot of the current generation of Hakka people are not able to speak the Hakka dialect fluently.

Wang (2017: 9) uses the example of a Hakka person named Samarn Laodumrongchai, who stated that his parents did not teach him the Hakka dialect, and he only knows of the word "*sibpont*", which means it is time to eat. The article notes that it is very difficult for the Hakka people to maintain their cultural identity due to the effects of the long-term assimilation policy, which encouraged the minority groups to identify as Thai people, in order to share the same privileges.

Even the former prime minister of Thailand, Yingluck Shinawatra, who was a full Hakka, only promoted herself as having a Thai identity, especially in the media. I argue that in a political aspect, it is understandable as to why Yingluck Shinawatra chose to identify as a Thai instead, as most of the voters in Thailand are of course the

Thais. If she had chose to identify as a Hakka instead, she might not have garnered enough votes to claim the coveted position, which would lead to her defeat.

Apart from that, the Hakka people seem to believe that by identifying as a Hakka, or as a Chinese, it is succumbing to the reality that the Chinese population in Thailand comes from a lower social class when compared to the Thai people, therefore it is not necessary to distinguish the differences between the different Chinese ethnic groups, and it is more beneficial to either identify as a Chinese in general, or as a Thai.

The younger Hakka generation has also lost their mother tongue in the process, and they are not knowledgeable about the Hakka culture and lifestyle, therefore they are confused when it comes to their cultural identity as a Hakka. However, they do feel the desire to express themselves as being a Hakka.

Wang (2017: 10) notes how the Hakkas choose to view and express their cultural identity is based on how one decides to define the term “ethnicity” and what are the factors that contribute to this term. Many Hakka individuals emphasized on the important of the Hakka spirit and values, and they believe that this is the real indication of the Hakka identity, and not necessarily the language or dialect.

The article states that these Chinese ethnic groups may only highlight their cultural differences and significances when the situation requires them to, especially during times of conflict. However, when the situation does not call for it, the Hakka people would prefer to identify themselves either as being a Thai or a Chinese. Hakka would most probably be the last in the list of identities.

Many Hakka individuals perceive themselves as being more inclined to academic pursuits, instead of business making, and that they are more interested in being part of the political landscape of Thailand. This becomes evident as a few of the former prime ministers of Thailand were of Hakka descent, which will be discussed later on in the chapter.

With the arrival of the new group of Hakkas that moved from Taiwan to Thailand, the cultural identity began to gain traction again because this new group of Hakka people brought along some new Hakka cultural development from Taiwan, which resulted in the revival of the Hakka cultural identity in Thailand. Therefore, Wang (2017: 12) argues that the cultural identity of the Hakka people was never completely forgotten, but it is paving its way into a new form of transnational identity for the Hakkas.

The article also argues that although the Hakka identity might not be prominent within the Thai context, but it has always been passed on from generation to generation through the efforts of the associations in the Chinese society. The Hakkas in Thailand were motivated to cultivate their cultural identity during the late 1990s because they were empowered by Hakka movements that have been occurring worldwide.

Therefore, Wang (2017: 16) argues that the Hakka is not a diasporic entity, but instead they possess a transnational identity because:

1. Transnational identity is pluri-local but lacks a clear centre-periphery relation between the different locales.

2. Transnational community puts focus on the continual proliferation process in which the community continues to migrate through several countries, which will eventually blur the cultural boundaries between each area.

According to Faist (2000, a cited in Wang, 2017: 17), culture is not to be seen as a direct relationship with one's homeland or origin, but instead it continues to evolve and transform beyond the boundaries of the people's homelands. The article states that the Hakka identity connotation is established through the interweaving of various aspects, such as the global interaction between the Hakka people, the national identity of the Thais, the classification of a Thai/ Chinese, and the interaction between the Hakka people and the others who come from different Chinese ethnic groups.

“It is important to see Hakka as an unfixed, changeable, and complex culture. While numerous Hakka people have held-on to their traditional ethnic identity, they are also undergoing continual self-construction and reconstruction through the influence of contemporary developments.” (Wang, 2017: 18)

3.6 The Language Awareness of the Hakka Community

According to Ungsitipoonporn (2011: 168), in Thailand, most of the people who speak Hakka originated from Meixian, which is located nearby Shantou of the Guangdong province in China. According to the article, the increase in intermarriages have resulted in the blurred lines of the Chinese ethnic groups in Thailand, as the characteristics of the descendants of the first Chinese immigrants have become quite indistinguishable.

The areas in which the Hakkas are densely populated are Bangkok, and also the southern provinces of Thailand such as Songkhla and Yala. The Hakka people

who can still speak Hakka belongs to the group of 50-year-olds and above, while the other Hakka people of the other age groups may have minimum capacity in speaking Hakka, or none at all. The article argues that one's language is one of the keys to the maintenance of cultural identity.

Currently, young Hakka people are almost immediately assimilated to the Thai culture, because there is not dire necessity for the young Hakka people to conform with the Hakka cultural identity, and at present there are no schools which are formally teaching the Hakka dialect to its students. The article argues that one of the most effective methods to preserve an endangered language is to introduce it to the education system of the community schools of the respective areas.

According to Mr. Nopphadol Chawalkorn (as cited in Ungsitipoonporn, 2011: 170) - a businessman-turned-lecturer who has spent years in learning about his Hakka origins, realized that the Hakka people do not have a true homeland, as they were constantly migrating from one area to another, thus giving them the name of “guest people”, because they were never truly “at home”.

The article writes that Mr. Chawalkorn has high hopes of revitalizing the usage of the Hakka dialect among the Hakka people, and also to preserve the remaining cultural notions that help to identify themselves as being Hakka, such as the language and historical knowledge. He has also established the Hakka study centre in Bangkok for several years, forking out his own money to invest in the collection of Hakka information through several aspects, however it is not operating anymore at the time of writing.

Several scholars in the academic realm of Thailand are of Hakka descent, such as Prof. Worasak from Chulalongkorn University and Prof. Arthorn from Thammasat University. However, the article states that not a lot of scholars are putting much time and effort to research on the Hakka dialect in Thailand, as more attention is focused on the more important languages such as Mandarin, which is the most common language that is taught in Chinese schools.

Apart from travelling to Taiwan in an attempt to create important connections with the Hakka people of that area, Ungsitipoonporn (2011: 174) mentions that Mr. Chawalkorn is also quite popular among the members of the Hakka associations scattered throughout Thailand. Unfortunately, he admits that his plan to engage in the revitalization of the Hakka dialect in Thailand has not been easy due to some internal factors.

For example, the Hakka associations in Thailand only meet every two years, and the World Hakka Conventions is only held every one or two years in selected countries all over the world. Even so, the matter of revitalizing the Hakka dialect is not a topic that is worth discussing in these conventions, as they are mostly more focused on displaying vernacular Hakka culture. Ungsitipoonporn (2011: 172) states that they do not even use the Hakka dialect as the main source of communication because a lot of the Hakka association members are unable to speak or understand Hakka.

At the present time, the most iconic piece of Hakka culture to date is the song entitled "*San Ge*", which literally means mountain song, and the original version is still being sung in China. Although this part of the Hakka culture is not written in

books, but the article explains that the knowledge of it has been passed down from one generation to the next, and these songs are becoming more and more popular due to its recurring theme revolving around love.

It is also stated that there was one Hakka youngster who attempted to recreate popular Hakka songs by using the Thai language as the lyrics, and it was a magical combination between two different elements – the Hakka melody and the Thai lyrics. This shows one of the efforts that is being executed by the younger generation of the Hakka community.

Therefore, Ungsitipoonporn (2011: 174) concludes by stating that the younger generation of the Hakka people should be encouraged to be proud of their heritage, as this provides a good opportunity and platform to forge a connection between Thailand and China. This is also to ensure that the Hakka dialect and culture are passed down from one generation to the next, allowing the traditional aspects of the Hakka lifestyle to be remembered for many more years to come.

3.7 Places of Worship for the Hakka People

According to Imsuksom, Chairatoom and Krutasaen (2019: 5647), most of the Chinese people that migrated to Thailand belongs to the Chinese Han population, which is also divided into a few different groups: Hokkien, Chaozhou, Cantonese, and Hakka. Along with them, they have also brought their art and culture to the new regions and settlements that they chose to reside in, and these elements were also subjected to change due to the geography, society, and economy.

The Hakka communities in China and Thailand are different in several aspects and although the Hakka culture and traditions had to forego some changes, but some

of the more prominent ones remained close to the original practice. The article states that the identity of the Hakka people was preserved and restored in Thailand, due to the emergence of a close-knit community and an association that was able to care for the wellbeing of its people. However, it is questioned as to how much of the Hakka identity was preserved, and whether it is still visible in today's modern context.

One of the main cultural indicators of the presence of the Hakka community is the establishment of a Chinese shrine that serves as a spiritual anchor for the people, and also to provide a platform for its people to learn about the art and culture of the Hakka people, as well as their way of living and thinking.

Currently, there are many Hakka shrines in Bangkok that experienced mass renovation, until the original architecture and traditional craftsmanship can no longer be seen by its patrons. However, the exceptions would be the Hon Mong shrine, Sam Nai Keng shrine, and Sam Sua Kok Ung shrine, which still remain as Hakka shrines that are still in very good condition. These shrines happen to be closed shrines (shrines that are only accessible to the local villagers and not for mass consumption or enjoyment) that belonged to the Sung clan.

Imuksom, Chaipratoom and Krutasaen (2019: 5649) relate the theory of cultural spread with this research, as they state that as a human being travels, they bring along with them their culture and they are also willing to accept new cultures that they encounter along the way. When it comes to a group of people, each having their own personality, knowledge, understanding, attitude, and values, the process of accepting new things and the flow of culture can be multidimensional.

The main elements of the architectural styles of the Chinese shrines are represented by the earth, water, air, fire, and metal, which happens to be a common attribute among the Chaozhou, Hokkien, and Hakka shrines. The exterior decorations of these temples include prosperous words taken from Chinese teachings, ornamental sculpted dolls, various auspicious entities such as animals, fruits, objects, carved wood, low relief sculptures, and many more.

According to Chaiyapotpanit (2014, as cited in Imsuksom, Chaipratoom and Krutasaen, 2019: 5649), the Hon Mong Kung shrine in Samphanthawong is a Hakka shrine that contains a stone inscription that was written in 1889, which explains about the purchase of the land that was used to build the Hakka temple. The articles also researched on the Hakka-owned Samnaigeng shrine located in Khlong San, which suggests that there used to be a huge Chinese community that lived around the areas of the shrine, and the canals nearby were also named after the names of Hakka.

Imsuksom, Chaipratoom and Krutasaen (2019: 5650) also note that the Hakka shrines in Bangkok possess a collective identity, instead of a singular identity, since they accept the attributes and influences from other cultures as well. Another interesting thing to note is that the articles define identity as being a social construction, and it has the ability and freedom to constantly change according to specific circumstances. One's identity can bear several characteristics, the identity that is multidimensional and also the identity that ebbs and flows according to the owner's situation.

The article also discusses about the different levels of identity, in which personnel identity can be understood as the identity that one chooses to portray and

conforms with as an individual, and also social identity, which is the identity that is showcased when situated in a social group or setting.

Ho (1995: 30) explains that the Hakka people did not get their own social spot in Bangkok's Chinatown, as they were found to have lived along the riverbank and in different areas such as Sampheng Road and Charoenkrung Road. The Hakkas often found themselves being neighbours with other ethnic groups, such as the Hokkiens and Teochews, and this might have contributed to the fluidity of their cultures as well, since the Hakkas are often accommodating to the other ethnic groups.

This situation is rather interesting, as the Hakkas have a proven track record of constantly migrating from one place to another, hence it would be difficult for them to be located in an area that they would have all for themselves, and they did not need to share with other Chinese ethnic communities.

In Bangkok, Ho (1995: 30) states that the Hakka community has six different temples located in various areas. One of the early Hakka temples was established in 1913, and the policy of the temple was solidified by a group of nine Hakka leaders. This group of men were all full-time merchants who were rather skilled in their trades, and they voluntarily offered their services in the taking care of the temple and its related businesses.

These leaders were in charge of planning, raising funds, supervising projects, and also garnering support from the fellow Hakka members who were also included in the daily routines of the temples. It seems that there was also a community that was built around the temples, in which each individual had a specific responsibility to

uphold, and since this was all on the basis of volunteering, each individual must have had a high sense of good values.

3.8 Political Leaders of Hakka Descent in Thailand

In this section, the case study of the Shinawatra siblings is used as an example to show that even though these two political leaders have a form of Hakka influence in their lineage, but they choose to portray themselves as being Thai, instead of being Chinese or Hakka. This could be one of the lenses that can be used to view the process of cultural assimilation between the Hakka communities and the different external parties.

According to an article written by Liu (2014: 23), former prime ministers of Thailand, Thaksin Shinawatra and Yingluck Shinawatra, are of Hakka descent, and they are also siblings. As stated by Terwiel (2011, as cited in Liu, 2014: 25), one of the most famous Hakka leaders in Thailand was the former prime minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, who started out as a police officer and eventually became rich by gaining rights over mobile phone networks.

Liu (2014: 25) explains that Thaksin's great grandfather, Seng Sae Kju, migrated from Guangdong to Siam during the late 1860s and married a local Thai woman and became a tax farmer, which enabled him to collect taxes on goods and services while keeping a portion of the tax to himself. Thaksin's grandfather, Chiang Sae Khu, also married a Thai woman, who is the daughter of a big landowner and trader, and both of them were involved in the garment market, importing silk from Burma and reexporting them as sarongs.

According to Phongpaichit and Baker (2009, as cited in Liu, 2014: 25), all the children of Chiang were involved in the family business, but his sons were given the priority to obtain a higher education whereas his daughters were immersed into the family trade almost immediately, and many of the family members were married to powerful Thai families, which in return helped them to become a commercially established family in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Jitra (2004, as cited in Liu, 2014: 25) mentions that the family name was changed from Khu to Shinawatra, when Chiang's eldest son, Sak, initiated the change in 1938, which eventually became the famous name that is widely renowned at this current era. Thaksin's father, Loet Shinawatra, married a native Hakka from Meixian, China, and instead of accepting his inheritance of the Shinawatra company, he decided to establish a local coffee shop instead.

Phongpaichit and Baker (2009, as cited in Liu, 2014: 26) explain that although Loet ran into some financial problems when he tried to enter the political landscape of Thailand, but he ensured that his son (Thaksin) was still able to study in one of the top schools in Chiang Mai during that time, which is Monfort College. After completing his studies, Thaksin Shinawatra decided to enrol in the police academy, in which he successfully completed and was offered a scholarship to pursue his tertiary education in Eastern Kentucky University, USA.

After marrying Pojaman Damophon, the daughter of a police commander in Bangkok, Thaksin decided to further pursue his studies once again by enrolling in the criminal justice PhD program of Sam Houston State University, Texas. This proves

that Thaksin Shinawatra is indeed a well-educated individual, and he constantly strives to expand his knowledge.

Phongpaichit and Baker (2009, as cited in Liu, 2014: 26) state that after pursuing the highest level of education, Thaksin decided to get involved in the commercial sector of Thailand, and upon achieving commercial success through winning bids to supply computers to government buildings, monopolizing on newly built mobile network concessions, and buying shares from the Bangkok Expressway Consortium (which were in charge of the freeways in Bangkok), Thaksin used his superior financial position to insert himself into politics and was appointed as the foreign minister of the Phalang Tham Party.

However, after many failed attempts to enter the Thai political landscape, Liu (2014: 27) explains that he successfully launched his own political party called Thai Rak Thai Party (TRT) in 1998, in which he presented himself as being the hero to small and medium-sized businesses, which made him a champion among the rural class of the Thai people.

After experiencing many hits and misses in his political career, the article states that Thaksin decided to sell the Shinawatra Corporation for 73.3 billion baht in 2006, and eventually he was sent into exile in London, and his beloved party was eventually dissolved in 2007. That marked the end of the Thaksin administration.

However, a few years after the reign of Thaksin, his youngest sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, rose into power with her political party, the Phuea Thai Party, which allowed her to assume the role and responsibilities of the prime minister for three years.

When the head of Phue Thai Party (PTP) announced his resignation, Liu (2014: 29) explains that Yingluck agreed to becoming the party leader, and she was determined to hold the prime minister position in the near future. After winning 265 seats out of 500 seats in the 2011 elections, she was made the prime minister of Thailand, a position she held for three years before calling out a snap election in February 2014 after the parliament was dissolved.

Her successor was supposed to be Niwatthamrong Boonsongpaisan, the minister of commerce at the time, but was ousted by the military after being in power for only two weeks. Finally, army general Prayuth Chan-ocha rose to power by becoming the self-appointed prime minister of Thailand in 2014, and he has been running the country as prime minister ever since.

The way that the Hakka leaders chose to represent themselves to the country is interesting to observe, as their first priority would be to identify as a Thai. This phenomenon suggests that maybe the Hakka community is not fully accepted by the general public yet, and that is why they chose to identify with the mainstream identity.

This could also mean that not much is known regarding the Hakka people, as instead of taking the time to learn about who they are and their culture, the Thai people prefer to view them as only being the “Chinese”, instead of their individual ethnic identity. This is also seen in the political leadership of the Shinawatra siblings, who did not do much for the Hakka community during their political reigns. It was definitely a missed opportunity to highlight the Hakka people more, especially in the eyes of Thailand.

3.9 The Case of the Hakka Community in Bangkok, Thailand

3.9.1 Introduction

This section of the study will illustrate the information that was gathered from the interview that was conducted with Weihong Huang, who is one of the administrative members and teachers of The Hakka Association of Thailand, located in Samphanthawong, Bangkok. I was able to get in touch with him through the means of Facebook Messenger, and he kindly agreed to proceed with the interview that was held on 28 April 2022 in the office of The Hakka Association of Thailand. Apart from that, supporting information from other literature sources will also be included in this section.

The interview with Weihong Huang has provided valuable information regarding the current festivals and rituals that are still being practiced in today's Hakka community in Bangkok, as well as the form of religious beliefs that the people practice in their daily lifestyles and a brief history of the clan association. In addition to that, information regarding past Hakka-related activities that were held by the association was also collected, as well as some of the Hakka cuisines and delicacies that are still being consumed today, and also information regarding the usage of the Hakka dialect among the members of the Hakka community.

It is important to note that the distinction between each Chinese ethnic groups is blurred rather significantly, and most of the cultural practices that are being implemented by the Hakka community are also shared among other Chinese ethnic groups as well. This situation occurred multiple times during the discussion with

Weihong Huang, in which it was difficult to categorize the cultural elements that belonged to the Hakka.

It is argued that the assimilation process that happens between the Hakka in Bangkok is between other Chinese ethnic groups that lives in the vicinity, as well as with the local Thai people who have been living in Bangkok much earlier than the Chinese immigrants who arrived decades ago.

3.9.2 Nine Emperor Gods Festival

One of the major festivals that are still being celebrated today by the Hakka community in Bangkok is the Nine Emperor Gods Festival (九皇爷诞). Although this festival originated from China and has since seen a widespread influence in the countries of Southeast Asia such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand, however it is no longer a common practice that is being conducted among the Chinese community in China. Although there are still some communities in China that still celebrate this festival, but it differs from the ones being celebrated in the aforementioned countries of Southeast Asia.

Across the region, the festival is held during the beginning of the ninth month of the lunar calendar, and therefore the dates are different every year. For instance, this year's festival will be held from 25 September 2022 to 4 October 2022, whereas last year's festival was held from 5 October 2021 to 14 October 2021. The common denominator is that the festival will be held for as long as nine to ten days every year.

In Thailand, this occasion is also known as the Vegetarian Festival, and practitioners and believers of this festival will abstain from consuming meat

throughout the whole course. Although the festival is widely celebrated in the province of Phuket, but it is still celebrated at a much smaller scale in Bangkok as well, and among the Hakka community.

Huang stated that before the pandemic struck in 2020, The Hakka Association of Thailand would always take up the pleasure of hosting the festival in the nearby temple, which is conveniently located beside the building of the association. Every year, the celebration will attract a medium-sized crowd of about 200 to 300 people, and a lot of activities and performances would be held to commemorate the occasion. Since the festival is also understood as the Vegetarian Festival, Huang informed me that even the prices of vegetables would increase rather significantly during this period.

The main purpose of the festival is for the practitioners to show their respect to the nine emperor gods, which is believed to represent the nine stars that can be found in the constellation. Huang mentions that the nine emperor gods would make their way to earth during this festival, and it is crucial for the practitioners to follow a certain diet to appease the descended spirits of the nine emperor gods. Other than that, some people would just like to take this opportunity to detox and cleanse their bodies from meat-centric dishes.

During this period, a lot of yellow flags can be seen all over Bangkok to signify the presence of the festival, and most products in the supermarkets that are vegetarian-based will have a small yellow sticker on the packaging, to make it easier for the Chinese community to pick up vegetarian products to adhere to this special diet. Apart from that, additional roadside stalls can also be seen during this period, in

order to encourage practitioners (or non-practitioners) to indulge in the many vegetarian dishes that they have to offer.



Figure 6.0: A local street in Bangkok decorated with the yellow flags and banners, symbolizing the occurrence of the Nine Emperor Gods Festival.

(Source: <https://www.asaihotels.com/guide/kin-je-a-vegetarian-festival-with-bites/>, accessed on 12 May 2022)

According to a pamphlet that was produced by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (2017: 6), the origins of the festival in Thailand started with the arrival of a Chinese opera troupe that performed in Kathu, Phuket. During their time there, an unexpected disease started to surface and led to the death of many villagers, including the performers as well. In order to curb the spread, the remaining performers requested the villagers to fast and take part in a ceremony that would please the Nine Emperor Gods, and eventually the disease came to a halt.

In another incident, a representative was brought from China to Phuket to invite the spirits of the Nine Emperor Gods to a local shrine, and an urn filled with

sacred ash (believed to have carried the sacred spirits) from the Palace of the North Star⁴ accompanied the arrival of the representative. From then, the sacred ash in the urn would be combined with the ash collected from the following years, to symbolize the connection between the past and the present, and to pass down the practice from one generation to the next.

These days, the festival continues to become an important occasion to the Chinese community in Bangkok, including the Hakka community, as it brings the meaning of renewal and purification, and functions to expel any sins and bad spirits from the community and worshippers that participate in the Nine Emperor Gods Festival. Huang explains that this festival continues to be a major occasion in the continuity of the Hakka culture, and it provides a platform for the people to gather and worship as a collective.

He hopes that after the current pandemic subsides, the festival can be held in its grandiosity once more, as he believes that it is important for the Hakka community to gather from time to time to participate in major celebrations such as this one. At times, street processions are also held in which followers of this festivals would walk along the streets.

3.9.3 A Unique Form of Religion

Although being a Buddhist-centric country, my informant Huang (interview, 28 April 2022) explains that the Hakka community in Bangkok practices a syncretic form of religion, in which most of the patrons who come to pay their respect at the

⁴ Also known as the Forbidden City, it once housed the emperors and their family members, and it remains as one of the largest and most preserved wooden architectural sites that can be found in modern-day Beijing.

nearby temple would worship every god that is located inside. He states that the main entity that is commonly worshipped among the Hakka community is known as *Guan Di*⁵, however they are also opened to paying homage to other deities as well (including Thai deities), and this creates a syncretic form of religion.

Coughlin (1960, as cited in Morita, 2005: 130) states that since the form of Buddhism that is practiced by the Thai people does not require complete allegiance, it gave the proper space needed for the Chinese community to insert these practices into their own, as it is observed that the Chinese people are opened to paying their respects to various objects of Thai origins such as the “*Lak Mueang*”⁶. It is also stated by Morita (2005: 129) that the Hakka community would worship a local deity known as “*Ben Tou Gong*”.

According to Huang, whenever he observes the Hakka people who visit The Hakka Association of Thailand, they would perform a brief bow to pay their respect to any statues or symbol of deities that they come across with. He notes that sometimes, these practitioners would not even know the origins of the deities, but they would still pay their respect as if they were obliged to do so.

Philipp (2014: para. 2) also confirms this phenomenon by explaining that there are many Chinese temples that can be found scattered throughout Bangkok, and although the main practice in these temples is Mahayana Buddhism, but its teachings and practices are also combined with other religions such as Taoism and Confucianism.

⁵ Also known as Kwan Ying in Mandarin.

⁶ Also known as Pillar of the State or Stone of the City, usually houses the deity or spirit that guards the city.

During the focus group that was conducted for this study, one of the Thai participants confirms this by saying that although she identifies herself as being a practitioner of Buddhism, but she finds herself paying homage to other deities as well, and she does not have any specific reason for doing so.

When asked about the main religion of the Hakka community in Bangkok, Huang explains that it is difficult to pinpoint it to just one religion, therefore he believes that the Hakka people are practitioners of a combined system of religions.

In addition to that, Huang also discusses about the number of deities that can be found in the temple of The Hakka Association of Thailand, and that it houses seven different shrines, and each shrine will house three deities. Therefore, the total number of deities comes up to 21.

At times, he sees the Hakka practitioners worshipping each deity that they come across in the temple, even though it may not necessarily be their main intentions. It is also mentioned that the most common deity that is worshipped among the practitioners at the temple would be *Guan Di*, the renowned Goddess of Mercy.

The informant also states that the Hakka people would have a variety of requests when they come to worship these deities, but the most common ones involved the request of more wealth and fortune. Sometimes, the practitioners would even go to the extent of asking the deities to show them a “lucky number” that they can utilise to purchase a lottery ticket.



Figure 7.0: One of the many shrines that can be found in the temple of The Hakka Association of Thailand, Bangkok. (Source: Personal collection)

3.9.4 The Hakka Association of Thailand

Back in 1912, Huang explains that a group of Hakka individuals teamed up to raise funds for a building that could be the new headquarters for The Hakka Association of Thailand. This building would have three floors, each one serving its own purpose. The first floor will house an informal school, the second floor will house the main offices whereas the third floor will house the local temple, dedicated to the Goddess of *Guan Di*.

In 1926, the Minister of Internal Affairs approved the construction of a new family hall, and Wu Zuonan and Ye Yunfang were tasked to be the president and the vice president respectively for The Hakka Association of Thailand. A few years later, the association wanted to expand their network and influence, therefore a few other branches were established around the nation. After a few name changes throughout

the years, the building has now become one of the main centers for Hakka-related activities.

The main objectives of the association is to provide a space for all the Hakka people who have migrated and settled in Bangkok, giving them an opportunity to connect and communicate with other members of the community, in addition to fostering lifelong friendships and networking. It also aims to develop the state of Chinese education and general welfare of the Hakka people in the area, as well as promoting the cultural undertakings of the association to its members and also to the general public.

Under the umbrella of The Hakka Association of Thailand, there lies a few different departments and committees, such as the culture and education committee, sports committee, publicity committee, women's committee, welfare committee, industry and commerce committee, joint district committee, and the youth committee. All these different departments try to work and cooperate with one another to ensure that the various aspects of the Hakka peoples' lifestyles are met, and that they are well cared for by the association.

Among the major activities that are held by the association is the "Hakka Cup", which is a table tennis competition that is open to participants of all ages. This competition is held bi-annually, and it is the perfect opportunity for youths of the Hakka community to learn more about other members, in hopes that it will pique their interest to discover more about the Hakka culture and ways of living.

Another major activity that was organized by the association happens to be the "Hakka Singing Competition", in which participants are required to perform a Hakka

song on stage. This competition is a great way to encourage the younger generation to learn more about the Hakka dialect, as well as one of the most important culture of the Hakka people, which is the Hakka mountain songs. Although the songs used to be one of the main element of Hakka culture back in China, nowadays the songs are rarely performed anymore.

In addition to all that, the association also organizes a larger scale conference every two years, in order to gather the leaders and members of every Hakka association in Thailand. Huang explains that this is an important event that is taken very seriously by the association, as it allows different organizations to learn from each other, as well as to initiate collaborative projects with one another. This also ensures that the connection between Hakka communities of different provinces can be well maintained and treasured. Huang explains that in the association, every member is encouraged to help one another, as everyone is equal.



Figure 8.0: The Hakka Association of Thailand. (Source: Personal collection)

3.9.5 Hakka Education and Dialect

According to Huang, there are actually two educational institutes that cater to the Hakka community in Bangkok. The first one is a combination of a primary school and preschool, which is known as Jin Tek School, located in Sathorn, Bangkok. The purpose of this school is to provide a learning area for children of the Hakka community to learn with other children of the community.

The syllabus of the school is similar to other schools that are operating in Thailand, unfortunately the option of learning the Hakka dialect is not provided in this school. Huang explains that the school does not see the need to teach the Hakka dialect to the students, as it is not being used in major examinations in the country. Therefore, Mandarin is the preferred medium to teach, as well as the Thai language.

Another institute that serves the same purpose happens to be a tertiary education institute, which is known as Asia Vocational College, located in the vicinity of the Suvarnabhumi Airport of Thailand. Constructed in 1998, the college officially started its operations the following year, and has been providing courses in various fields since then.

One of the main focuses of this institution is to provide more attention to the area of Chinese studies, as well as equipping the students with multiple skills in accountancy, marketing, business and more. From time to time, the college would invite skilled professionals and lecturers from China to provide classes and lessons to its students.

Besides that, cultural exchange programs are also conducted at times to enhance the relationship between the managing teams in Thailand and China, creating

an effective bond between the two. However, Huang explains that although the institution tries to implement knowledge of Chinese studies to the students, but not much attention is given regarding the Hakka people and their culture.



Figure 9.0: The building of the Asia Vocational College in Bangkok, Thailand.

(Source: <https://www.facebook.com/asiaLKB>, accessed on 10 June 2022)

In regard to the usage of the Hakka dialect, Huang explains that it is observing a steady decline in the Hakka community, and there are several factors that are causing it. One of the main reasons is the increase of the usage of Mandarin in schools and workplaces, which is also proven through the information gathered in previous chapters. With most Chinese people using Mandarin in their day-to-day life, the need for using Hakka as a form of communication becomes redundant.

These days, Hakka is only being used within the household, as older generations of the Hakka community still uses it to converse with their children and grandchildren. Although the younger generation might learn and understand the basic

words of the Hakka dialect, but it is not sufficient to ensure the continuity of the dialect. Huang explains that the younger generation does not see the importance of preserving the dialect, as it is only used in informal settings around the household. Apart from that, with the increasing demand for youths to master other languages such as English and Mandarin, I argue that it also might be too troublesome and difficult for the younger generation to take up an additional language.

3.9.6 Cuisines and Delicacies of Hakka Origin

Based on an article by Gao (2017: para. 3), it is stated that the original Hakka food is categorized as being heavy and hearty, as the Hakka people used to work in the fields quite a lot, therefore the food needed to be able to provide the necessary energy for their labour. Hakka cuisines are often very fragrant and quite salty.

In addition to that, Huang explains that since the Hakka people practice a nomadic pattern, salt is used as a preservative to ensure that the food will be able to last throughout a specific amount of time, especially during their travels. He also explains that the traditional method of preparing these Hakka dishes take a long time as the process is very detailed, therefore people these days have adopted a faster approach to making the food, which inevitably affects the taste of the dish.

In Bangkok, there are only a handful of restaurants that serve Hakka cuisines, and Huang states that although the food looks “Hakka” on the outside, but the taste of the dishes have been adapted to the local tastebuds of the Thai people. He explains that this is also caused by the lack of ingredients that can be found in Bangkok, therefore the cooks and sellers had to improvise and work with what was available to them instead.

However, Huang informs me that there are still one or two restaurants around Chinatown that serves authentic Hakka cuisines, and although the price is slightly more expensive than the other restaurants, but the taste of the dishes is definitely closer to the original ones, as their method of preparing the food also differs from the other restaurants.

Some of the more common Hakka cuisines that are often being prepared these days are “*Miang Tofu*” (stuffed tofu), “*Mei Chan Rou*” (braised pork), and “*Yan Zhi Ji*” (salt-baked chicken). As a home cook himself, Huang also enjoys preparing Hakka dishes when he has free time, as he prefers to prepare Hakka food according to the traditional method.

3.10 Conclusion

Through this chapter, it is prominent that the Hakka people were forced to reconstruct their identity in order to provide themselves with a better life in a foreign land, and this comes with the cost of losing a small part of the Hakka culture along the way, or it was forced to assimilate with the local culture to become a new form of hybrid culture. The Hakka is a minority group with strong influence in multiple aspects, however they are still pressured by the local government regarding policies of assimilation.

Punyodyana (1971: 1) states that existing sources of literature indicates that the relationship of the Chinese and the Thai possesses a nature of integration and assimilation, instead of conflict and polarization. The article agrees that there is a high degree of assimilation and social integration between the Chinese and the Thai people, as shown in this statement:

“The process of Chinese-Thai assimilation is a two-way process which in the long run will leave Thai with something Chinese and Chinese with something Thai.”

(Dr. Puey Ungphakorn, as cited in Punyodyana, 1971: 1)



CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

In this section of the study, I will attempt to compare the cultural assimilation that has occurred in the Hakka communities in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Bangkok, Thailand. Not only will the differences will be compared, but the similarities will also be evaluated in order to find a common ground for these two communities.

In terms of the comparison, I will look into several aspects of the cultural assimilation such as the festivals and celebrations that are still occurring, the form of worship and religion that exist in these communities, the role of the Hakka associations in these two cities, the presence of the Hakka dialect as a form of cultural indicator, the visibility of the Hakka food culture, and the forms of art and culture that are still active.

4.2 The Comparison between the Cultural Assimilation of the Hakka Communities in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Bangkok, Thailand

4.2.1 Festivals and Celebrations

When viewed in the perspective of its festivals and celebrations, both the Hakka communities in Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur are still celebrating major Chinese festivals such as the Chinese New Year, which falls on the first month of the lunar calendar. Chinese New Year happens to be the adjoining celebration for the whole Chinese population as a whole, both in China and also the rest of the world.

The act of gathering the family during the day before the new year officially starts is present in both communities, as families will use this opportunity to reconnect

with one another, either with their immediate family members or with their extended family members as well. Normally, a big feast is held to commemorate this special occasion, and various Chinese dishes and cooking are served to replenish the family, as well as to hope for better prosperity and good fortune in the upcoming year.

According to Yuan (2016: 5), before the festivities of Chinese New Year is able to happen, the house must be given a thorough cleaning in order to expel any form of bad fortune while making a clear path for good luck to enter the household instead. This is still prominent in both Hakka communities, as participants of the focus groups confirm that this is still a common practice during Chinese New Year.

Apart from that, the article also mentions the act of receiving a red packet from parents and grandparents, and this red packet is known as “*Hong Bao*”. When this part of Chinese New Year occurs, the younger ones are expected to “*kowtow*”⁷ for three times before their elders, as a form of showing their respect before receiving their red packets. The red packets are usually inserted with cash, in which the amount is determined by the giver.

The focus group participants also confirm this by saying that the act of giving and receiving the red packet happens to be one of the many highlights of the festivities, especially for younger children who are excited to line up and wait in line for their turn to perform the kowtow and receive their red packet.

One of the younger participants also included that these days, with the rise of modern technology and smarter gadgets, sometimes the red packets are not physically present anymore, and that younger parents could also opt to give the money to their

⁷ An act of kneeling while touching the ground with the forehead.

children to the means of online banking or through scanning a QR code to transfer the money, especially during the pandemic. These modern changes can potentially be studied as well.

Apart from Chinese New Year and the joy of gathering together as one big family before the day of the new year, the other festivities that are celebrated bear some differences in both communities, and will therefore be discussed next.

It is observed that there is a major difference in the choice of festival that is celebrated in both communities. In Bangkok, the Hakka community choose to celebrate the Nine Emperor Gods Festival whereas in Kuala Lumpur, the festival that has a stronger importance is the Tian Chuan Re, or also known as the Sky Mending Day.

For the celebration of the Nine Emperor Gods Festival, the Hakka community in Bangkok will practice a strict dietary requirement, and that involves not consuming meat throughout the nine or ten days of the celebration. Apart from that, certain herbs are also not allowed to be consumed during this period because it will interfere with the detoxification process of the body, which is one of the main objectives of doing the diet in the first place.

The Tian Chuan Re, on the other hand, does not require the Hakka community in Kuala Lumpur to go through any specific diet regime, but instead it is recommended that Hakka people do not work during that day, as it is believed that any work done on that day will be wasted anyway due to the hole that is made in the sky. During this celebration, the Hakka people will feast on glutinous rice cakes,

which is believed to help with the patching process of the hole in the sky due to the sticky nature of the rice cakes.

Another difference that can be seen in these celebrations is the scale. In Bangkok, it is observed that the celebration of the Nine Emperor Gods Festival is done at a larger scale, as even supermarkets and local vendors take part in the festival by applying yellow stickers for vegetarian products across the city.

In Kuala Lumpur on the other hand, the Tian Chuan Re is celebrated at a much smaller scale, as most of the activities are normally conducted within the family, therefore making it perceived to be a more “at home” type of celebration. Hakka associations would sometimes organize events and activities to commemorate this special occasion, but it is still not comparable to the scale of the festival that is being held in Bangkok.

Although both of these celebrations are different, but the belief of it is based on Chinese mythology, with the Bangkok Hakka community believing in the legend of the nine emperor gods, who will travel to earth during this celebration in order to meet their loyal subjects; whereas the Kuala Lumpur Hakka community believe in the legend of Goddess Nuwa, who was the one who successfully patched the hole in the sky.

However, my informant Dr. Pek explains to me that the Nine Emperor Gods Festival is still celebrated in the Hakka community of Kuala Lumpur, but when comparing the significance of each celebration to the community, Tian Chuan Re is definitely the larger occasion. On the other hand, the Hakka community of Bangkok

do not really recognize the celebration of the Tian Chuan Re, and it does not hold much importance in the community.

4.2.2 Religion and Worship

When looking through the lens of religion and worship, both Hakka communities are still practicing ancestral worship as the base of its religion, although the interpretation of it has evolved in each community. In addition to that, it is observed that both Hakka communities have been able to bring their own belief of worshipping the Chinese deity into their daily life.

For example, one of the common Chinese deity that exist in both communities is the Goddess of Mercy, Guan Di, or also commonly known as Guanyin or Kwan Ying, depending on the dialect used to describe the goddess. According to Hedges (2012: 4), the goddess has become the main element of devotion within the sphere of Buddhism and Chinese culture, and that her significance is shown through the placing of her image in many home shrines.

The article also argues that the goddess could be perceived as a symbol of feminism, as images portrayed of her are very strong in nature. When participants of the focus group were asked about Guan Di, most of them agree that she is a symbol of mercy and compassion that should be emulated by all those who worship her, and her portrayal of feminism comes second.

Apart from that, although each community received a lot of influence from Buddhism and Confucianism, it is observed that they both practice a syncretic form of religion, as it is hard to place a main religion for the Hakka communities in both

areas. Both groups practice different forms of religions, and at times they are not even aware of its origins.

In addition to that, both communities also include the worship of local deities into their practice, albeit the local deity that they worship are different. In Kuala Lumpur, the existence of the Xian Shiye cult can serve as a testament to this statement, while the Hakka community in Bangkok include the worshipping of the city spirit who resides in the Lak Mueang. Both communities found the need to worship local deities in order to enhance protection.

It is important to note that both Hakka communities have the same practice of worshipping local deities, however the deities differ from one another as it is accustomed to the environment that they were in. These local deities can range from historical figures who contributed to the development of the Hakka community to local spirits who are believed to grant protection to those who show their loyalty.

The Hakka community in Bangkok is described as being a community that worships all kinds of gods, as Huang explains that although the Hakka people may practice Confucianism or Buddhism as their main religion, but it is often infused or combined with other elements from various religion.

For example, the Hakka people believe in the existence of a city spirit, that ensures the protection of the city and its citizens. In this case, the city spirit is considered as a local deity as the presence of it only came about when the Hakka people migrated to Bangkok. At times, Hakka people would visit the city spirit shrines to show their respect and ask for certain requests and blessings.

In the case of Kuala Lumpur, the local deity that stands out is definitely the headman of Kuala Lumpur founder, Yap Ah Loy, who is known as Sheng Ming Li. The death of the headman during the battle between different Hakka clans proved to be painful for Yap Ah Loy, and he decided to build a temple after winning the war, to honour the fallen headman.

This has generated a cult that is known as the Xian Shiye cult, which have a large network of followers and temples across the country. In Kuala Lumpur, the Sin Sze Si Ya temple is one of the main temples that advocate for this cult, as statues of Sheng Ming Li, as well as other important members of Yap Ah Loy's group, can be found inside.

It is also interesting to note that in each community, the source of the local deity differs from each community. To illustrate, the city spirit that is worshipped by the Hakka people do not have a concrete origin as to where the deity came from whereas in Kuala Lumpur, the Hakka community is well aware about the history of Sheng Ming Li and the origins of the Xian Shiye cult, which has become one of the major players in the religious landscape.

4.2.3 The Hakka Associations

In both cities, the existence of Hakka associations have proven to be helpful in many ways, such as functioning as a tool to create unity within the Hakka community, to discuss news and issues related to the Hakka community, as well as being a platform for the Hakka people to gather and communicate with one another. The associations in both communities also exert a certain type of power and influence, in

which is promoted through the existence of a organizational hierachy among its core members.

In addition to that, the associations in both cities also try to maintain a close relationship with the Hakka associations of China and Taiwan, in which they rely on to some extent for some support. The associations also try to organize activities from time to time in order to encourage comraderie between the members of the community, as well as trying to promote the cultural values of the Hakka people to the society.

In terms of the Hakka associations, one major difference that can be observed is that in Kuala Lumpur, the Hakka associations are all joined and taken care of by another larger association, which is the Federation of Hakka Associations of Malaysia. It is believed that this makes it easier for different associations to collaborate with one another, as the federation serves as a platform and opportunity for larger-scale events to happen.

In Bangkok, the Hakka Association of Thailand plays the role of this federation, in which it acts as the mediator for the several Hakka associations across the country. Although it is commendable that the association would want to take up this responsibility as being the middle person, however it does make it difficult for the Hakka Association of Thailand to focus on engaging its local Hakka community, as it also needs to put attention in engaging the different Hakka associations by organizing annual events.

4.2.4 The Use of the Hakka Dialect

In terms of the presence of the Hakka dialect, both communities still practice the dialect, however the visibility of the dialect differs from one another. In addition to that, both communities have seen a gradual decrease in the usage of the Hakka dialect over the years, with Bangkok seeing the stronger decline between the two.

At least half of the Hakka community in Kuala Lumpur is still able to converse efficiently in the dialect, whereas Thai participants of the focus group confirm that they are doing their best to learn the dialect before it is too late. The participants state that the dialect was not conversed regularly to them when they were younger, therefore they are now taking the initiative to revitalize the dialect by taking classes from Hakka dialect experts.

In both communities, there are two common factors that resulted in the decline of the Hakka dialect, which are the increasing importance of the Mandarin language in schools and workplaces, as well as the lack of interest that is shown by the younger cohort of the Hakka communities in both cities.

For the case of the Hakka community in Kuala Lumpur, Chinese schools were willing to put their attention into the utilization of Mandarin in their education system. Ang (2009: 21) explains that with the emerging influence of China, particularly in the aspects of politics and economy, the economic value of Mandarin has seen a drastic increase, making it one of the most profitable *lingua franca* in the world. This is similar to the case of Bangkok as well.

As for its younger generation, most of them do not see the importance of learning the dialect, as they are under the impression that the Hakka dialect is not a

dialect that can be used when conversing in formal environments, and most of them feel like learning an additional dialect is putting too much burden on their shoulders.

Although both communities show a visible presence in the usage of the dialect, but the level of visibility is the main difference here. In Kuala Lumpur, Dr. Pek explains that at least half of the Hakka community is still able to speak and converse in Hakka, and that the dialect can easily be heard in restaurant or social settings as well.

He believes that even though the younger generation shows a lack of interest in learning the dialect, but their elders are much more persistent in forcing their children to learn the dialect. The motivation to do so is quite high as the elders understand the importance of preserving the dialect before it declines any further.

In the meantime, the Hakka community in Bangkok shows a less promising state in conserving the dialect, and I argue that it has reached the revitalization stage instead. Huang explains that the Hakka community rarely uses Hakka in their everyday conversations because Thai becomes the preferred language among all members of the society.

In this situation, even the older generation have a difficult time to converse in the dialect fully, and therefore they do not impose this requirement as much to their children. The Hakka participants from the focus group explain that although they are considered as being the older Hakka generation, but they themselves could not speak in the dialect. They are now in the process of learning the dialect through personal effort.

4.2.5 Hakka Cuisine and Delicacies

When observing the Hakka food culture in both communities, it is safe to say that the food culture is still present, albeit with different levels of visibility. One common element would be that both communities have since adapted the method of preparation for the Hakka dishes, in which the process is much quicker and more cost effective.

In this fast-paced environment, it makes sense as to why both communities had to adapt to evolving needs of the world, in which people are not willing to wait so long for their food anymore, especially in restaurants. Therefore, vendors had to come up with quicker methods to prepare the food without losing too much quality in terms of its taste.

With that said, Hakka restaurants are also still present in the Hakka communities, as these restaurants serve as a place for patrons to enjoy Hakka dishes without going through the hassle of preparing the food themselves. However, the number of Hakka restaurants and restaurants that serve Hakka food is undoubtedly higher in the Kuala Lumpur community, which is partly due to the higher visibility of the Hakka people in general.

However, when discussing about home cooking, the time needed to prepare the food is much more forgiving, therefore cooks at home are able to spare more time in order to ensure that the quality of the food is not affected. In both communities, home cooking of Hakka dishes is still common to see in Hakka households, especially during major celebrations.

One of the Hakka dishes that are still visible in both communities is the stuffed tofu, also known as Miang Tofu in Bangkok and Yong Tau Foo in Kuala Lumpur. When asked, participants of the focus group state that the stuffed tofu will normally be the first dish that comes into mind when they think about Hakka food and cuisines. The other dish would be braised pork, which has a high content of fat.

When speaking about Hakka food in general, most participants agree that it is a symbol of close relationships with family members, as food seems to always be the factor that brings people together. There is a certain nostalgic feeling that is felt whenever the Hakka people indulge themselves in their traditional dishes, and this is common in both communities.

It is evident that the Hakka food culture has a much larger presence in Kuala Lumpur, as there are at least 20 restaurants that serve Hakka food as part of its menu. The most prolific restaurant in Kuala Lumpur is Hakka Restaurant, located in Jalan Raja Chulan, which is reviewed more than 2,000 times in Google at the time of writing.

The Hakka food culture in Bangkok is still present, but it is not as prominent as it is in Kuala Lumpur. The number of Hakka restaurants in Bangkok is quite limited, and they are mostly located in the district of Samphanthawong. Most of them do not have an online presence, which makes it difficult for people to find them. The popular one is known as Piang Kee, which specializes in traditional Hakka cooking such as stuffed tofu and braised pork. As mentioned earlier, nowadays there are some vendors who prepare Hakka food, but it is catered to the taste buds of the Thai people.

However, when comparing the Hakka dishes in both communities, I find that there are dishes that exist in one community, but is not present in the other. For example, the Lei Cha in Kuala Lumpur and the Salted Chicken in Bangkok. These two dishes are more specific to their respective cities, or at least it is not as popular as the other Hakka dishes.

Apart from that, the Yee Sang has also become one of the main Hakka dishes in Kuala Lumpur, which is a dish that is commonly served during Chinese New Year. Although the dish has no Hakka origins whatsoever, but it has assimilated to the food culture of the Hakka community, and it is widely accepted and practiced as well, especially considering it is a representation of good wealth, fortune and prosperity.

4.2.6 Art and Culture of the Hakka

Last but not least, let's discuss about the art and culture that are still present in these communities. Both of my informants agree that there is no particular item of art and culture that is strong enough to represent the Hakka identity, apart from the traditional Hakka mountain songs that have since evolved into modern Hakka pop songs. These traditional Hakka mountain songs have been promoted by the Hakka associations or several other third parties and companies through occasional singing competitions.

It is argued that although the element of the traditional Hakka mountain songs is slowly fading away in each community, but the evolution of modern Hakka pop songs can also be considered as a strong element of art and culture. We must take into account that these songs may be an effective tool in fostering Hakka knowledge

among its listeners, as well as encouraging them to connect with their roots and learn the Hakka dialect.

Both communities also hosts events that provides an opportunity to promote Hakka culture, and although sometimes there are dance performances that accompany singers who are singing a Hakka song, but this is not considered as Hakka dance as the dance movements are created just to accompany the song and does not carry much cultural significance.

When comparing the art and culture of the Hakka communities in both cities, it is observed that the Hakka version of the Lion Dance once existed in the community of Kuala Lumpur, and although the performing art form is not so visible in today's context anymore, but remains an important part of the Hakka people's art form.

In Bangkok, the Hakka version of the Lion Dance did not exist, as Huang explains that the Lion Dance that is often seen within the community is the common ones that are usually performed during the celebration of Chinese New Year. These types of Lion Dance can be categorized into two: Chinese Northern Lion Dance and Chinese Southern Lion Dance.

4.2.7 Conclusion

In short, there are still many similarities that are shared between both Hakka communities in Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur, although they have gone through different experiences of assimilation in their respective settlements.

The following are two separate tables to illustrate the similarities and differences that are observed in the Hakka communities in Bangkok, Thailand and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

To conclude, it is prominent that there are several similarities and differences that appear when comparing the cultural assimilation of the Hakka communities in Bangkok, Thailand and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. In the next chapter, the factors that might have contributed to these similarities and differences will be discussed.

	The Similarities between the Hakka Communities in Bangkok, Thailand and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Festivals and Ceremonies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The celebration of the Chinese New Year • Gathering with family members for a big feast • Cleaning the house before the start of the new year • Giving and receiving the “Hong Bao” (red packet)
Religion and Worship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The base of the religious aspects of both communities is ancestral worship • Syncretic form of religion is practiced • Involves Confuciansim, Buddhism, Taoism, and more • The worshipping of the Chinese deities and local deities are also a common attribute
Hakka Associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The associations in both communities play a huge role for the Hakka communities • Providing a platform for Hakka people to gather

	<p>and communicate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussing Hakka related issues • Taking care of the general wellbeing and welfare of the Hakka people in its vicinity.
Presence of Dialect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still spoken among the family members and during informal settings • The decline of the dialect in both communities is affected by the increased usage of Mandarin • Lack of interest to learn the dialect that is shown by the younger Hakka generation
Cuisines and Delicacies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Hakka food culture is still present • There is still a number of Hakka restaurants that serve Hakka food and dishes in its menu • The more common Hakka dish that in both communities are the stuffed tofu and braised pork
Art and Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apart from traditional Hakka mountain songs (which is also gradually declining), there is no other traditional art and culture that is strong enough to represent the Hakka community • Both communities have shown effort in introducing Hakka dialect and culture through modern songs

Table 1.0: The Similarities between the Hakka Communities in Bangkok, Thailand and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

	The Differences between the Hakka Communities in:	
	Bangkok, Thailand	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Festivals and ceremonies	Nine Emperor Gods Festival	Tian Chuan Re
Religion and worship	City Spirit	Xian Shiye Cult
Hakka associations	Individual Hakka associations	Existence of a larger federation that connects the different associations
Presence of dialect	Lower	Higher
Cuisines and delicacies	Salted Chicken	Lei Cha and Yee Sang
Art and culture	No Hakka Lion Dance	The once-existing Hakka Lion Dance

Table 2.0: The Differences between the Hakka Communities in Bangkok, Thailand and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

4.3 The Factors behind the Different Experiences of Cultural Assimilation

4.3.1 Introduction

In this section, I will attempt to analyse and provide explanations as to why the Hakka communities in Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur had to assimilate themselves with the local cultures of their new settlements, and to what extent. Apart from that, a final summary and conclusion will also be included at the end of this section.

Upon understanding the situations of both communities, it is observed that one of the main factors that encouraged them to go through the process of assimilation is

due to certain state policies that were implemented by their governments, as the policies gave more benefits to the local communities, as well as to those who are willing to give up their original identity, in order to be recognized as one of the “locals”.

Besides that, the need to unite as “the Chinese” is also one of the factors that encouraged the process of assimilation in both cities. Since the Hakka people arrived in small numbers, by being united with other Chinese ethnic groups to appear as one unified Chinese community will provide them with more strength and stability in their new settlements, and this leads to increased blurredness between the cultures of different Chinese ethnic groups.

It is understandable that being the “new people” in a new community, the Hakka people had to be adaptable in order to be accepted by the locals. Therefore, I argue that the fear of not being accepted had also caused the Hakka people to assimilate with the local community.

In addition to that, the Hakka communities in both cities have also experienced processes of close proximity with the local people, such as intermarriages and strong connections, which gives them the opportunity to socialize with the local communities at a higher frequency, therefore easing the process of cultural assimilation between the Hakka people and the local people of their cities.

4.3.2 The Condition of National Policies

In Thailand, the reign of Phibun Songkhram as prime minister really caused a huge impact on the perspective of the Chinese immigrants, and they were compelled to reassess their identity as an individual, as well as a community. The conditions of

the assimilation policy that was employed by Thailand during those years proved to be one of the stepping stone that led to the assimilation of the Hakka community.

Wang (2017: 4) explains that a large number of third-world countries have shifted in the way that they govern their countries, and this has resulted in the existence of “nation-states”, similar to the concept implemented by European countries during the 18th century. As a downside, this situation had forced minority groups to obliterate and cast away their cultural and ethnic identities, in order to give way to the new “national culture” that was being promoted by the country.

In the past, the Thai government was no stranger to this situations, as the article cites the example of the Lue people of Xishuangbanna, China, who had to alter their cultural identity to coincide with the assimilation policies that were administered by three separate nations (China, Thailand, and Laos), and currently the Lue people are perceived as being an ethnic group that carries three different cultural identities, according to where they are located.

Prime minister Phibun Songkham was responsible for redefining “Thai people”, and the article explains that a shift of perspective happened when this definition not only included the “original Thai people”, but also minority groups and Muslims across the country. It was also during this time that anti-Chinese cultural policies were imposed by the government, which resulted in the panicking of the Chinese, as well as the Hakka people.

According to Intarapirom (2007: 32), during the administration of Phibun, Chinese schools were treated in a very serious manner, and they were asked to close due to the fear of spreading communism among its students. Apart from that, since the

state was focused on promoting a new national identity, the methods of teaching in Chinese schools did not go in line with that vision as it was perceived as promoting “Sinoism” (being Chinese).

The articles also explain that these Chinese schools were found to have violated various regulations imposed by the government, such as allowing the execution of illegal activities in the school compound, as well as having secret classrooms to teach courses that are frowned upon like the political doctrine of Chinese nationalism.

The teachers in the school also played a huge role in this suspicion, as some of them were disguising as teachers in order to impart their political ideologies and spark interest in the Chinese students for the political regime, and they were playing an important part in the political movements that were happening in China during that time.

To combat these situations and to regain complete control, prime minister Phibun envisioned a set of guidelines to tackle the Chinese schools in the nation, and the notion of dissolving Chinese schools completely was even considered during the cabinet meeting that happened in 1939. He believed Chinese schools and associations should cease to exist.

The article states that, referring to the statistics given by the Education Ministry in 1938, there were a total of 293 private schools that were providing lessons in Chinese language throughout Thailand, and 51 schools decided to close voluntarily while 242 schools were ordered to close by prime minister Phibun between 1938 and 1940. This meant that there were no Chinese schools left during that period.

According to Wang (2017: 5), the anti-Chinese policies were loosened in 1961, and by 1990, prime minister Anan Panyarachun rules that Chinese was to be the second foreign language in Thailand, prioritised after English. However, the article indicates that the Chinese people were no more perceived as being a minority and they were actually integrated into the Thai community due to their strong economic position, which would benefit the country as a whole if the government starts to treat them as more of an ally.

The article reiterated that due to all these changes, the identity of the Hakka community remained invisible on the surface level, and they held on to a stronger sense of a Thai identity for a long duration, but they also hope that one day, they could be acknowledged as a Hakka by the government, instead of just being a Thai and/ or Chinese.

It is believed that the assimilation policies that were adopted by the Thai government had left the Hakka with not much of a choice, and they had to show their cooperation and willingness in order to secure a better life and equal opportunities. This was an important factor for the Hakka community, especially being the 'foreigner' in Thailand.

One of the focus group participants also agrees, as she states that identifying herself as being a Thai open more doors for her, especially in the general public. When she does this, she does not need to deal with the discrimination that may occur when one identifies as a Chinese.

In the case of Malaysia, assimilation policies were also imposed by the government for the need of constructing a national identity, but the implementation of

it was much more forgiving than the one that was administered by prime minister Phibun in Thailand, as it was much more focused on fostering nationalism, instead of spewing negative perception.

Unlike other Chinese communities who were assimilated into the local communities, the Chinese community in Malaysia were able to experience a smaller degree of assimilation, and therefore their sense of the Chinese identity remains strong. They have been able to maintain a sense of ethnic consciousness.

It is argued that since Confucian teachings remain prevalent in the instillation of Chinese education in Chinese schools, as well as in social settings and folk religions. Many Chinese still continue to obtain their education from schools that use Chinese as a main source of communication and teaching. Although this may be true for the Mandarin language, it may be a different experience for the Hakka people in Malaysia, as Hakka is not formal subject that is being taught in schools.

The idea of a multi-ethnic nation that gave priority to the special rights of the Malay people while also giving freedom to non-Malays in the utilization of the mother tongue, religion, and the running of vernacular schools of other language groups, the Chinese community did not face a forced process of assimilation.

It is important to note that although freedom is given to the non-Malays, the implementation of the National Cultural Policy proves that in the process of shaping the national culture, the Malay culture was given the most importance. Similarly, this was the case for the education and language policies as well. (Lee, 2012, as cited in Chin, 2020: 18)

According to Nagata (1979, as cited in Chin, 2020: 18), since the concept of “*Bangsa Malaysia*”⁸ showed an intense amount of dominance for the Malay culture, this was also evident in the construction of the Constitution, and it implies a strong notion of becoming Malay. This concept of “*Bangsa Malaysia*” might provide some space for the voluntary assimilation of the minority groups, and it might appear that the Chinese people might slowly be fully integrated, or “*masuk Melayu*”, which means to become a Malay.

However, since there was no forced assimilation that was imposed, it is entirely up to a Chinese individual to decide whether or not to assimilate with the local culture. Although the Malay culture is strong and prominent, there are also some cases in which the Chinese communities, although small, were able to retain their Chinese identity and consciousness.

Chin (2020: 20) suggests that the Chinese community in Malaysia did not really see the value of becoming a Malay, as it is perceived that they lose much more than what they will gain. For instance, the government had already acknowledged that the Chinese people are of a higher economic position in the country, and the New Economic Policy (NEP) was administered in 1970 in order to reduce the economic gap between the Malays and non-Malays.

This policy is further strengthened by the emergence of the “*bumiputera*”⁹, which is a term and imagined concept used to group the Malays and natives of East Malaysia, in which comes a variety of benefits such as lower prices when purchasing

⁸ A concept that tries to highlight the “Malaysian Race”, instead of the individual ethnic races in Malaysia.

⁹ In English, it can be understood as “son of the land” or “children of the soil”.

properties, as well as a smoother process to obtain a loan from the bank for to purchase a house or a vehicle.

Apart from that, becoming a Malay means becoming a Muslim as well, and the Chinese people perceive that practicing Islam is equivalent to disbanding their Chinese identity and cultural traditions. (Tan, 2004, as cited in Chin, 2020: 20)

This is different from the case of Thailand, as the similarities of religion between the Thais and the Chinese are closer, as both communities also practice the religion of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism. From this, it is inferred that religion plays an important role in the process of cultural assimilation between the immigrant minorities and the host community, and it is an area worth studying.

The conversion of non-Malays into becoming Muslims was and remains as a huge barrier in the process of assimilation, as when a Chinese decides to marry a Malay individual (by Malaysian law, a Malay must practice Islam), they must be converted into becoming a Muslim as well, and that in itself carries a series of perceptions.

According to Edmonds (1968: 67), the appeal of becoming Islam has varied in regard to the security of the position of the Chinese in Malaysia, and also with the place of Islam in the Malay society. Although the conversion to Islam is a smooth and easy process, but since the social structure of the Malays have seen such a close integration of the religion, it has just resulted in a complicated combination of social, economic, and political factors.

The article also explains that the since the British policy tried to retain the Malays in their rural environments, this has created a sense of alliance between the

Malays against other minority groups such as the Chinese. This continued to create tension between the two groups, and therefore complete assimilation did not happen.

It is important to note that all these national policies perceived Chinese as being one big umbrella term, which encompasses all the various Chinese ethnic groups, including the Hakka people as well. Therefore, the Hakka communities are also equally affected by these government-administered policies.

It is argued that the Hakka community in Kuala Lumpur experienced a different degree of cultural assimilation when compared to the Hakka community in Bangkok due to the condition of the national policies that were implemented. The non-Chinese centric policies that were imposed by the Thai government pushed the Hakka people to re-evaluate their cultural identity, and therefore experienced a process of assimilation that is much more successful.

4.3.3 The Need to Unite as the “Chinese”

In this section, it is argued that the cultural assimilation process occurred between the Hakka people and other Chinese ethnic groups because they were faced with the need to unite as a whole collective, instead of just identifying as their own Chinese ethnic group. Therefore, as more time is spent with one another, the assimilation process becomes more prominent.

The Hakka communities in Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur remain as a minority, even within the larger Chinese community. It is argued that the Hakka people of Bangkok, despite being assimilated with the Thai community under the government’s assimilation policy, they also had to endure a similar process with other ethnic Chinese groups.

The same can be said about the Hakka community in Kuala Lumpur, although they did not endure a complete assimilation with the Malay people, but the process of assimilation with other Chinese ethnic groups have proven to be more successful, thus blurring the cultural differences between the various Chinese ethnic groups.

Although the Chinese community found it more attractive and beneficial to identify as a Thai, but the desire to identify as a Chinese did not completely disappear, despite most of the Chinese people adopting Thai names and incorporated Thai culture and values into their everyday routines.

Therefore, when prioritizing what one would identify as, the Hakka community would most often identify as being a Thai first, and this is especially true among the younger generation, who are perceived as being Thais with Chinese blood, and who have lost touch with the cultural identity of their ancestors.

When a Hakka individual chooses not to identify as Thai, they would then identify as being Chinese first, before eventually identifying as a Hakka. Thus, the need for one to identify as a Chinese triumph over the Hakka identity, making it seem like the Hakka identity is close to being “unremarkable” in the cultural landscape of Thailand.

It is argued that the need to identify as Chinese instead of as Hakka is also due to the implementation of the anti-Chinese policies by prime minister Phibun Songkhram, which encouraged the Chinese community to unite and create a strong alliance.

For example, Wongsurawat (2009: 167) explains that due to the political unrest that was happening, respected academics from China suggested that the

Chinese community in Thailand should be given additional protection, by deploying Chinese troops in Thailand and ensuring the safety and protection of the overseas Chinese community.

This work also discusses about the Yaowaraj Incident that happened in Bangkok's Chinatown on September 20, 1945, in which involved the Chinese community and the Thai government. The incident occurred when a group of Thai policemen interfered the rehearsal of a group of overseas Chinese who was rehearsing for the upcoming celebration of Chinese National Day.

The Thai policemen informed the members of the group that in order to publicly display a foreign national flag, it must also be accompanied with the public display of the Thai national flag. However, when members of the group failed to do so, things started to heat up, and it eventually led to a violent shooting incident between various parties.

Although it was the Chinese-Thai who committed the first shot, but the Chinese newspapers in China shared a different story to the citizens, stating that the Thai policemen took violent measures to dampen the situation. This became an opportunity for the Chinese government to ignite Chinese nationalism among its citizens, as well as the members of the overseas Chinese community in Thailand.

Apart from that, Wongsurawat (2009: 175) also discusses about the Plabplachai Incident, which took place on 3 July 1974, and is perceived to be one of the most destructive riots to occur after the Second World War. Although the Thai press documented the details of the incident, but the article states that not much is known about the root cause of the incident.

It all started when Thai policemen tried to arrest a Chinese man – Poon Lamlueprasert, for parking his car illegally at the bus stop which was located at the front of the Nakornluang Insurance Company in Charoenkrung Road. When the man refused to do as he was instructed, the policemen tried to arrest him and bring him to the Plabplachai police station.

This resulted in a minor but physical disagreement between both parties, and when the policemen managed to drag the man to the police station, the commotion had already attracted the attention of many, especially the Chinese community. As the crowd grew bigger, the article explains that more policemen were requested to help with the situation, as the police station was starting to get attacked by incoming bricks and stones.

Although the arrested man was brought out by the policemen to prove that he was not receiving any brutal treatment, the crowd did not subside. In addition to that, police vehicles which were parked around the area were being vandalized as well, and reinforcement from other police stations started to appear. As night started to fall, the incident only got worse, and the Plabplachai police station even caught fire at one point.

The incident continued until 7 July 1974, a few days after the initial arrest of the convicted man, and the article explains that this situation became worse than it needed to be due to several reasons, one of them being that the anti-Chinese perspective that was promoted during the reign of Phibun still lived on.

These two incidents, although being brutal and violent, gave an opportunity for the rise of Chinese nationalism among the Chinese community, especially when

the community was given additional encourage from the Chinese government of China. Due to the anti-Chinese plot, it is argued that some Chinese felt the importance to unite as a large Chinese group, instead of the individual Chinese ethnic groups, because this would give them better protection from the local Thai authorities, especially in the presence of trouble.

As for the Hakka community in Kuala Lumpur, the need to come together as a united Chinese group is evident, especially since the local government favours the development of the Malay community more. This provides an avenue for the Hakka community to put their Chinese identity as a priority first, and then comes the Hakka identity.

When a group of people decides to do this, individuals of that group are required to follow the majority as well, or they may face hardships when they do not comply. In the case of the Hakkas, being part of a larger group provides a sense of safety for the individuals, as being in a community also provides meaningful connection to every member.

This situation is extrapolated further when the community faces tension with other ethnic groups, and in the case of Kuala Lumpur, the occasional disagreements between the majority Malays and minority Chinese resulted in a violent incident that occurred in 1969.

According to Kua (2008: 34), the racial riots of 1969 between the Malays and the Chinese was one of the most violent incidents in Malaysia's history, and it happened a few days after the general election, when the United Malays National

Organisation (UMNO) experienced some setbacks in the polls. It is alleged that the outbreak was planned beforehand.

The article also explains about a concept known as *Ketuanan Melayu* (Malay Dominance), which prioritises the needs and development of the Malay community, but at the same time provides multiple opportunities for racial discrimination to happen. This concept became stronger after the status quo was endangered during the racial riots of 13 May 1969.

This concept of *Ketuanan Melayu* comes with a lot of pros and cons, and although it helps to be a unifying factor for the Malay people in Malaysia, but at the same time it encourages harmful and negative racial sentiments towards the other races that are not Malays, and this could lead into so many disagreements in the future.

To break it down even further, the Malay word “*tuan*” means owner or master in English, so the term *Ketuanan Melayu* loosely translates to “everything that is owned by the Malays”, or in other words, Malay sovereignty. This concept highlights the notion that the land of Malaysia belongs to the Malays, and they should have ultimate rights to the land and the activities that are held on this land.

Joseph (2015: 1 – 2) explains that this concept does not appear in the Constitution, and the logic of providing special rights to the interest of the Malays are constitutionally sanctioned. According to the Federal Constitution of 1957, although other communities were given the rights to citizenship, but it is the responsibility of the *Yang Di-Pertuan Agong* (the King) to provide extra attention to the special position of the Malays and the Bumiputera (indigenous communities in Malaysia),

while also taking into consideration the interests of the other communities such as the Chinese and Indians.

Therefore, with the rise of this concept of *Ketuanan Melayu*, it is argued that the Chinese had to come up with a way to unite as a group, and instead of putting out their individual Chinese ethnic identity, the need to identify as Chinese becomes more important, and they had to put aside their differences in order to work together as a unit.

To illustrate this point, if each Chinese ethnic group identified themselves as their individual Chinese ethnic group, it would divide the group and their numbers would appear small. However, if each individual identified as a Chinese, it would seem like their numbers are higher, and this would provide better security for their position in the country.

Hence, the Hakka identity was not as important as the Chinese identity, and therefore their cultural differences were momentarily forgotten. This resulted in an increase in the cultural blurriness between the different Chinese ethnic groups, as they had to unite and, in the process, assimilate with other ethnic Chinese groups as well.

It does not help that some Malay political leaders will use the racial riots of 1969 to instil fear in their followers, stating that if the Malays do not work hard to maintain the current status quo, the Chinese might beat us in the race and the racial riots will occur once more. This sentiment further pushes the concept of *Ketuanan Melayu* to the public.

Vethamani (2019: 21) states that it is becoming more common for extremist nationalist groups to utilize the threat of the repeat of the 1969 racial riots whenever

the opportunity arises, and these sentiments are often announced in public settings and also widely advertised or published in the general media.

The article quoted an example from Yiswaree (2017, as cited in Vethamani, 2019: 21), stating that a collective of various Malay-centric groups had decided to create a new front to defend Islam against the rudeness and dominance that is shown by the other ethnic groups, and they were “worried” that the dark incident of the 1969 racial riots would happen again.

Another example that the article borrowed from Koon (2012, as cited in Vethamani, 2019: 21) explains that Sharizat Abdul Jalil, a prolific Malay politician, reiterated that if the position of UMNO becomes weaker and is unable to resolve its challenges, the tragedy of the 1969 racial riots might happen sooner than we think.

To take another example from a Malay politician, Jamal Yunos, who posted an announcement on his Facebook profile, stating that if the upcoming “*Bersih 5*”¹⁰ were to happen again, he vowed that the 1969 racial riots will happen again at the same time, date, and place as the supposed protest of “*Bersih 5*” that was to happen on November 19, 2016.

Hence, with all these racial sentiments that are constantly occurring on a daily basis in Malaysia, it is clear as to why the Chinese community felt the need to unite as a working unit, to ensure that if anything of the sort happens again, they would be prepared to defend for themselves and not let the majority get the best of them.

Unfortunately, this also means that the Hakka people had to reconsider their identity for the time being, in order to work together for the collective goals and

¹⁰ A form of peaceful protest that champions for a cleaner election process.

objectives of the Chinese community. With time, some of the cultural differences were forgotten or assimilated with one another, which makes it difficult for the Hakka people to identify their true culture.

4.3.4 Intermarriages and Close Relationships

Another factor that motivated the cultural assimilation to happen between the Hakka community and the other Chinese ethnic groups is the occurrences of intermarriages that happened quite frequently. It is observed that since the Hakka people had to spend a lot of time with the other Chinese ethnic groups, it provided a platform for them to get to know one another and eventually get married once the time was right. For the case of Thailand, the occurrence of intermarriages between the Chinese and the Thai were also quite common.

According to Lauro (1988: 304), the term “*Luuk Ciin*”¹¹ was used to describe a child who is an offspring of a Chinese father and a mother who is Thai or partially Thai, and these children were perceived in a more positive manner than Thai children. This phenomenon normally occurs when Chinese men started to appear in Thai villages, and they would get married to local Thai women in order to live a “normal” life.

The article also states that since the Chinese have always been more financially stable, the rate of intermarriages among the Chinese and the Thais were occurring quite frequently because they had the means to do so, as throwing a wedding ceremony can sometimes cost a large sum of money and the young couple

¹¹ All Thais with Chinese origin or blood are generally called this term, which also means “Chinese child”.

has to be prepared to bear all the costs that are related, especially if their parents were not able to provide financial assistance as well.

Apart from the aforementioned term, the Chinese people were also known as “*jek*”, which is a negative term that is used to insult these people, and as Prattanasanti (2019: 4) explains, it is more common for the Chinese people to use the term “*Thai Chue Sai Chin*”, which is understood as “a Thai who has Chinese blood”. The article also states that during the administration period of prime minister Phibun, the Chinese people had to eliminate their Chinese names and adopt Thai names instead. This incident contributes to the cultural assimilation process that the Chinese people experienced with the Thais.

Punyodyana (1971: 67) states that one of the many social interactions that the Chinese community had with the local Thai people were friendship and intermarriages, and experts believe that there is no real boundary for the cultural assimilation between the Thais and the Chinese, since the rates of intermarriages are quite high between the two groups.

One of the participants from the focus groups explains that she did not even know about her Hakka identity until she was in her 30s, when she decided to ask her parents about her Chinese ethnic identity. When she learned about it, she was quite shocked as she did not expect that she had a Hakka identity, then she started to learn more about her own cultural roots.

This is an example of how intermarriages could possibly be one of the reasons as to why the Hakka community was able to assimilate rather successfully with the local Thai people, because the parents may or may not share about their cultural roots

to their children. For the parents who prioritized the importance of their cultural roots, they would ensure that their children would know about them too. For those who do not, their children would just grow up and identify themselves as Chinese, or in most cases, just as Thai.

This is further proven by Wang (2017: 3), who states that immigrants may form various social interactions with the host community such as marriages, religious activities, cultural behaviours and so on, and this will lead to the gradual decline of the immigrants' culture and traditions, as they take up new cultural elements from their host community.

Another participant of the focus group also confirms this by saying that she has never heard the Hakka dialect being spoken at home, although her father was of Hakka descent, but even he could barely speak the dialect. This proves that although intermarriages can result in a new form of hybrid culture that could be interesting, however it is undeniable that cultural elements of both of these cultures will fade at the same time, and a lot of measures need to be taken in order to preserve these cultures before they disappear for good.

For the case of the Hakka community in Kuala Lumpur instead, the rate of intermarriages and close relationships occur more between the Hakkas and the other Chinese ethnic groups, instead of with the Malay community. This is made possible through several factors such as being resettled into new communities and the place of Islam in the country.

As stated by Nyce (1973: 115), the resettlement plan did not take into account the various Chinese ethnic groups that migrated to Malaysia, and through the

perspective of the government, all the Chinese ethnic groups belong to a unifying term of just the Chinese. Hence, some villages may have several different Chinese ethnic groups residing together, commonly having a group that forms the majority.

Given the situation in these villages, although in the beginning they did not communicate much with one another due to the differences in their dialects, but as the minority groups were pushed to learn the dialect of the majority for the ease of communication, more friendships will forge, and eventually this will lead to a higher rate of intermarriages.

As a result, offspring that are produced through these intermarriages carry two or more cultural identities, depending on the cultural identities of their parents. For example, if a Hakka man marries a Cantonese woman and they gave birth to a child, the child now has the cultural identities of both Hakka and Cantonese, which makes the child half-Hakka or half-Cantonese.

Chai (2016: 227) explains this by saying that children that come from intermarriage families consume both of their parents' culture as they grow up, and they are given the choice of which cultural identity to identify with. In addition to that, the life events that the child goes through also has an influence on which identity that they choose to go with.

These situations create a cultural negotiation between the two cultures, as the child grows up learning about both cultures, it is inevitable for the child to mix up the two from time to time. This negotiation would also cause a natural decline of both cultures because the constant exchange that happens would eventually dilute one of the cultures. This also depends on which parent is the more dominant one in the

family. To illustrate, if the Hakka mother is the more dominant parent in the family, thus the family would practice a higher percentage of the Hakka culture instead.

When looking at the intermarriages between the Hakka people and the local Malays, it is more unlikely because of the difference in cultural values. Ling (2008: 23) explains this by stating that the Chinese community in Malaysia still maintains a prominent Chinese identity because they have rarely intermarried with the local community of Malaysia.

According to the laws of Islam, when a Muslim woman is ready, she must marry either a Muslim man, or a man who has converted in Islam, and the Malaysian government has imposed that those who have converted to Islam must then adopt a Malay name. This is the same case for Muslim men when looking for a life partner.

This alone has become a huge barrier in the process of intermarriages between the Chinese and the Malays, as the Chinese believe that giving up on one's religion is almost equivalent to losing one's cultural identity. Hence, the notion of getting married and assimilated to the Malay community has not been an attractive element for the Chinese.

It is quite rare for the Malay community to assimilate to the Chinese culture because as Edmonds (1968: 66) explains, since Malaysia is still lacking a general Malaysian culture that encompasses all the various racial identities in the country, the next alternative is for the Chinese to accommodate to the majority community, the Malays.

Therefore, the success of intermarriages between the Hakka people and the Malays were not so great, as the notion of converting to Islam is not an attractive

option for the Hakka people, and if they did, they would have to give up multiple cultural elements such as their religions, dietary habits etc.

This is closely related to the Confucian concept of maintaining the family tie or family name, and in order to do that, practitioners must have the same religious and cultural values. Ancestor worship also plays a huge role in this, as this is not something that is practiced in Islam and is considered to be forbidden (*haram*) as well, therefore the Chinese people would not be able to maintain the practice of worshipping their ancestors if they converted to Islam.

4.4 Conclusion

It is prominent that the cultural assimilation of the Hakka communities in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Bangkok, Thailand shows a visible degree of differences, while also sharing some similarities between the two. This can be observed through multiple aspects such as the festivals and ceremonies, religion and worship, the roles of the Hakka associations, the use of the Hakka dialect, the presence of the Hakka food culture, as well as the artistic elements.

It is argued that the different experiences of cultural assimilation in both Hakka communities is caused by several factors, which can be categorized into three main items: the conditions of the national policies that were implemented in both Hakka communities, the need to unite as the “Chinese” during times of trouble and adversary, as well as the phenomena of intermarriages and close relationships that are forged between the Hakka communities with their local communities, as well as with other ethnic Chinese groups in the area.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of Research

Through this study, it is observed that the cultural assimilation of Hakka communities in Bangkok, Thailand and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia bears a lot of differences, as well as a few similarities, and this observed through various cultural connotations such as the festivals and ceremonies that are celebrated, the religion and worship that is practiced, the role and activities of the Hakka associations, the presence and usage of the Hakka dialect, the Hakka cuisines and delicacies, as well as the art and culture of the Hakka communities in both cities.

In terms of the festivals and ceremonies that are still being celebrated today, the Hakka communities in both cities are still celebrating Chinese New Year as one of their main celebrations, and some of the shared cultural practices include having a big feast with family members on the day before the new year, cleaning the house and also giving and receiving the red packets that contain cash.

However, in Bangkok, the celebration of the Nine Emperor Gods Festival is quite popular among the Hakka community, as this festival offers the opportunity for practitioners to cleanse their bodies and souls by abiding to a strict vegetarian diet regime, that also forbids the consumption of certain herbs.

In Kuala Lumpur, the Hakka community celebrate Tian Chuan Re (Sky Mending Day) instead, in which they give praise to the goddess for helping them mend a hole that was made in the sky. It is believed that any work done on this day will not be recognized, therefore the Hakka people are encouraged to take the day off and spend time with their family members.

Through the aspects of religion and worship, it is observed that the Hakka communities in both cities share the same foundation, which is ancestral worship, and members of both communities practice a form of religion that is syncretic, which involves teachings from various school of thoughts such as Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism and more. In addition to that, the worshipping of Chinese deities and local spirits are also included in the combination of these religious practices. Both communities still organize religious practice in the local temple that is nearest to their residence.

However, the Hakka community in Bangkok also worships a city spirit, which is believed to help guard and protect the city from any harm. These spirits can be found in city shrines that are placed in several locations, and the Hakka people would pay their respect to these city spirits from time to time.

In Kuala Lumpur, the Hakka community also includes the religious practice of the Xian Shiye cult, which is a form of worship that is directed to a local hero named Sheng Ming Li, one of the loyal comrades of Kuala Lumpur's developer, Yap Ah Loy. Upon the death of his trusted colleague during a civil war, Yap Ah Loy established a temple to honour his spirit.

The Hakka associations of both communities play an impactful role in the development of the Hakka people in their cities, which never fails to provide a safe space for the Hakka people to gather and interact with one another, and it has also become an avenue for the discussion of Hakka related issues. They also make a lot of effort to take care of the general wellbeing and welfare of the Hakka people in their jurisdiction.

The main element that differentiates the two is that in Bangkok, there is no overall Hakka association that combines and becomes the headquarters for the several Hakka associations that are located sporadically across the country, whereas in Kuala Lumpur, the Federation of Hakka Associations of Malaysia plays the important role of being the mediator for all the different Hakka associations in the country, making it easier for national-level Hakka-centric events to be organized.

Besides that, the presence of the Hakka dialect in both these communities is still very much present, as the dialect is still used in informal settings or when conversing among family members. The decline of the dialect in both communities is unfortunately affected by the increased usage of Mandarin, which is used more in schools and the workplace, as well as the lack of interest that is shown by the younger generation to learn Hakka.

When comparing the presence of the dialect in both communities, it is observed that the Hakka community in Kuala Lumpur shows a higher engagement in the usage of the Hakka dialect, as there are more families that are still using the dialect on a daily basis, whereas in Bangkok, the situation is different as not many Hakka people are able to converse in the dialect anymore. Apart from that, the presence of the Thai language also motivates the ongoing decline of the dialect in the Bangkok Hakka community.

In terms of the Hakka food culture, it is still very much present in both communities. This is shown through the existence of a few Hakka restaurants that serve Hakka food and dishes in their menus. There are also several households that still prepare Hakka cuisines from time to time, as the process takes up a lot of time

and sometimes it is not feasible to cook these dishes at home. The most common Hakka dishes that can be found in both communities are the stuffed tofu and braised pork.

In Bangkok, the Hakka dish that is still being enjoyed today is the Salted Chicken dish, in which is not so common within the Kuala Lumpur Hakka community. On the other hand, the Hakka people in Kuala Lumpur are still consuming Hakka dishes such as Lei Cha, which is a form of pounded tea that is used as a broth, which is not common in Bangkok. The Hakka people in Kuala Lumpur have also adopted the consumption of the Yee Sang during Chinese New Year, which shows another cultural element that was assimilated by the Hakkas.

When discussing about the art and culture that is still visible in the communities today, it is observed that apart from the traditional Hakka mountain songs (which is also not very popular within the Hakka community), there is no other evidence of art and culture that is visible enough to represent the community at a cultural level. Most of them have been diluted in the process of assimilation or have integrated into becoming part of the Chinese culture, instead of just belonging to the Hakka community.

In Kuala Lumpur, there used to be a Hakka version of a Lion Dance that was performed during Chinese New Year, but nowadays it is a rare occasion, and only the older Hakka generation have seen the performance in person before. In Bangkok on the other hand, the Hakka Lion Dance did not exist at all.

After comparing the cultural assimilation of both Hakka communities in Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur, a question arises: what are the factors behind the

different experiences of cultural assimilation that has occurred in both communities? Here, it is argued that there are three main factors that influence the experiences within the Hakka communities in both cities.

The first factor is caused by the condition of the national policy of their respective countries, and their general attitude towards the Chinese. In Bangkok (and Thailand), the overseas Chinese community was affected by the anti-Chinese sentiments that were publicly advertised by prime minister Phibun Songkhram, who went to the extent of introducing anti-Chinese policies to curb the immigration of the Chinese into the country, as well as exert control over the actions that they were allowed to do during that period.

During this time, the Hakka community was required to reimagine their identities, as the assimilation policy that was introduced by prime minister Phibun carried a lot of benefits for members of the minority groups who decide to strip off their original cultural identity and assume the identity of a Thai instead. This has contributed to the success of the cultural assimilation of the Hakka people into the host community, which are the Thais.

In the case of Kuala Lumpur (and Malaysia), the state policies that were implemented also favoured the Malay community and the *bumiputera*, although the nation has a plural society consisting of different ethnic groups who are supposed to live together “harmoniously”. In the presence of this situation, the cultural assimilation of the Hakka people with the local Malay people were not so successful, as these racial sentiments have affected the ability for these ethnic groups to communicate with one another with ease.

As for the second factor as to why the cultural assimilation experiences in both Hakka communities are different, the need to unit as the Chinese played an important role. In Bangkok, two serious incidents in Chinatown involving the Chinese and the Thais have set the course for this need, as the disagreement that they had with one another motivated the Chinese people to be united and presented a stronger front.

Because of this, the Hakka people had to temporarily forget their Hakka identity, and put up their Chinese identity instead, in order to achieve stronger unity and maximum strength. The newspapers in China also contributed to this situation as they used this chance to promote Chinese nationalism among the people in China, and also the overseas Chinese community.

In the case of Kuala Lumpur, the racial riots of 1969 played a huge role in this factor, as the war between the Malays and the Chinese during that time resulted in much blood, sweat, and tears. Even after the riots, the Chinese people did not feel safe as they were afraid that they would be attacked at any time as well, and this motivated the Hakka people to identify as just a Chinese, in order to seem more united and that they have a larger number as an overall.

In addition to that, the emergence of the *Ketuanan Melayu* concept also contributed to this factor as well, as strong sentiments of pro-Malay discussions were being shared by extreme nationalists who believe that the land of Malaysia only belongs to the Malays, and the needs of other groups who were non-Malay should always be placed lower than the Malays. This also resulted in a heightened sense of fear among the Hakka people, which encouraged them more to be presented as a united Chinese group to the majority, instead of just the Hakkas.

Last but not least, the rate of intermarriages between the Hakka community and other ethnic groups also played a huge role in the cultural assimilation of both communities. In Bangkok, the rate of intermarriages between the Chinese and the Thais are relatively high, and this contributed to the success of the cultural assimilation of the Hakkas into the Thai community as well.

The Hakka community in Kuala Lumpur had a different experience, as they did not assimilate with the local Malays as much due to the complications of the mandatory conversion into Islam if they chose to get married with a Malay, and therefore intermarriages between the two are not so common. However, the Hakkas did show a high rate of intermarriages with other Chinese ethnic groups instead, which is caused by the conditions of the new Chinese villages.

The occurrences of intermarriages between the Hakka community and the local people have become one of the major catalysts in the process of cultural assimilation. In Thailand, intermarriages are more likely to happen between the Hakka people and the Thai people due to the common similarities that they share in terms of religion and cultural practices. Besides that, the assimilation policy that was administered by the Thai government further motivated the Hakka people in the quest of cultural assimilation, as they see more benefit in “being Thai”.

On the other hand, the Hakka community in Malaysia did not go through a similar process of cultural assimilation with the local Malays, mainly due to the major differences in religion and cultural practices, which proved to be a strong barrier and prevented the Hakka people to assimilate locally. In relation to that, intermarriages between these two groups are also not too frequent. Apart from that, the feeling of

being united as “one Chinese” remains strong as the Hakka people continue to put up a strong foundation for themselves and their community, and although there have not been any major cases of racial riots in recent years, but the tension between these two groups remains fairly visible.

Informed by the theory of cultural assimilation, it can be observed that the Hakka communities in both cities have gone through the first stage of structural assimilation, as the Hakka people managed to have close relations with the host community. However, the theory suggests that in order to completely complete the first stage, the immigrant community must experience the end of discrimination and prejudice, which is an interesting area to research on. On hindsight, it seems that this is not the case in both cities, as the Hakka people in Bangkok prefer to identify as Thai first, which saves them from being discriminated based on their identities, whereas in Kuala Lumpur, the Chinese people are often being discriminated by the Malay majority, as well as the Malaysian government.

Furthermore, a subsequent addition to the cultural assimilation theory suggests that the level of acceptance of the host community must also be considered. In Thailand, it seems that the Thai people were willing to accept the Chinese and Hakka people to a certain extent, as assimilation policies that were introduced by the Thai government proved to be beneficial to the Hakka community. In Kuala Lumpur, the level of acceptance that is showed by the Malay community is quite debatable, as the concept of “ketuanan Melayu” is still in play, especially during voting season.

In relation to that, the revised segmented assimilation theory suggests that children of immigrant communities also have an impact in the process of cultural

assimilation, as they have the choice of choosing to identify with which culture. In this case, the situations are quite similar in both cities, as the number of younger Hakkas who are interested in preserving their Hakka culture and roots is not so appealing at the moment. Efforts are being done by Hakka associations and other third parties, in hopes to preserve the Hakka culture and roots, as well as revitalizing it and attracting more attention from the younger generation. If more and more Hakka children do not care about this matter, then the culture of the Hakka community might see a demise in the future.

Therefore, it can be stated that the cultural assimilation theory and segmented assimilation theory can both be applied in both case studies, although in varying degree and extent. It is observed that both communities have not assimilated fully with the local communities, as a number of Hakka people are still trying to keep their spirits high and preserve the culture that was given to them by their ancestors.

Through this study, it is observed that although the process of cultural assimilation did occur in both Hakka communities of Bangkok, Thailand and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, but the experience differs from one another due to several factors. Therefore, it is concluded that the Hakka community in Bangkok, Thailand was able to culturally assimilate with the local Thais whereas the Hakka community in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia had a higher success of culturally assimilating with other Chinese ethnic groups, instead of with the local Malays.

5.2 Further Suggestions

It is interesting to see whether these different experiences of cultural assimilation may lead to different impacts on the Hakka community as a whole, and how the next few years will play out for the assimilation process. I believe that with some efforts that must be taken by the Hakka associations, the local government and also the Hakka people themselves, that the cultural values of the Hakka communities can be identified further and be preserved for the upcoming generation.

It is also worth to study whether conducting revitalization projects for fading Hakka cultures such as the Hakka mountain songs and the Hakka Lion Dance would prove to be successful, as this would be a great step towards preserving the Hakka culture. This movement has already been initiated by several organizations in Taiwan, and it will be noteworthy to observe whether the same movement can be conducted with success in Southeast Asia.

As mentioned earlier, the modernization process also plays a role in the general development of the Hakka communities in these two cities. Changes are bound to happen due to the increase usage of technology, as well as social media. Other than that, the Covid-19 pandemic could also have an impact on the traditional practices of the Hakka communities.

ACADEMIC VITAE

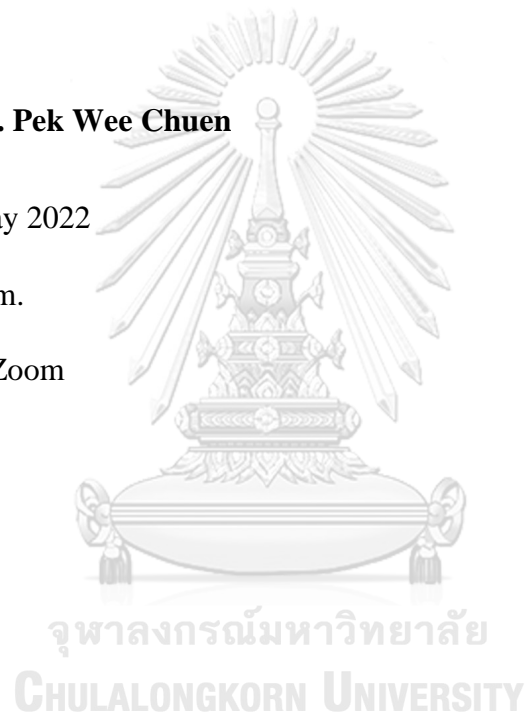
Douglas Philip Labadin hails from the city of Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, a state located in the eastern parts of Malaysia. Before pursuing his studies in the field of Southeast Asian studies, he obtained a Diploma in Dance, as well as a Bachelor of Dance with Hons. (Performance) from the National Academy of Arts, Culture and Heritage (ASWARA) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. During his bachelor's degree, he had completed a research work which focused on the comparison between teaching methods of Chinese dance in two secondary schools in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. Apart from that, he had also conducted research which highlights the localization process of Chinese dance in Malaysia, and how it transformed into having a Malaysian-Chinese identity, instead of just a Chinese identity. Currently, his research areas are centred around the topic of Chinese diasporic studies, as well as the art and culture that is entailed within the Chinese diaspora community in Southeast Asia, especially in the performing arts. For any further inquiries, please contact him through his email address – dougleelost@gmail.com.

APPENDIX (A)**Interview Details****a. Name: Weihong Huang**

- Date: 28 April 2022
- Time: 10 a.m.
- Location: The Hakka Association of Thailand, Bangkok

b. Name: Dr. Pek Wee Chuen

- Date: 2 May 2022
- Time: 1 p.m.
- Platform: Zoom



APPENDIX (B)**Focus Group Questions**

1. What does being a Hakka person mean to you?
2. What do you identify as? Hakka? Chinese? Thai? Others? Why?
3. What are the cultural indications that make someone a Hakka person?
4. What do you think is the main religious practice of the Hakka community?
5. As a Hakka, do you still practice any Hakka customs or culture? (dialect)
6. Do you think it is important for the Hakka culture to be preserved?
7. Do you think that the Hakka culture of your country has been assimilated with the local culture? Why?
8. Upon initial research, it can be observed that the Hakka culture in Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur is not the same, although they come from the same Hakka origin. Why?

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CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY



จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย
CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY

VITA

NAME Douglas Philip Labadin

DATE OF BIRTH 30 September 1995

PLACE OF BIRTH Sabah, Malaysia

INSTITUTIONS ATTENDED The National Academy of Arts, Culture and Heritage (Malaysia)

HOME ADDRESS 11/56, The Base Park West, Sukhumvit 77, Phra Khanong Nuea, Watthana, 10110 Bangkok, Thailand

PUBLICATION The Pedagogy of Chinese Dance in Malaysian Secondary Schools, The Localization of Chinese Dance in the Klang Valley: The Works of Wong Kit Yaw

AWARD RECEIVED Rector's Award, Dean's List Award, Leadership Award, Excellence Award, Best Graduate of the Faculty Award (The National Academy of Arts, Culture and Heritage)