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MISSION PATHWAY

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HAKKA IN TAIWAN
AND WORLDWIDE



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PRAY FOR THE UNREACHED

HAKKA IN TAIWAN AND WORLDWIDE

THE HAKKA WAY: SURVIVAL AND EVOLVING IDENTITY

Writer: Joan

Dandelion Resilience: The Hakka Philosophy of Life

Whether drifting on water, riding the wind, or hitching a ride on an animal's fur, a dandelion always finds a way to take root in new soil. Its feathery white puff may seem fragile, yet it holds remarkable resilience—just like the Hakka people, whose gentle exterior conceals a steadfast strength.

Throughout history, the Hakka have migrated many times. As “latecomers,” they often found themselves on the social margins. They could not claim the most fertile fields or occupy the centers of wealth and power. Instead, they carved out a place for themselves in the mountains and on barren lands, clearing wilderness to survive. In such harsh conditions, unity was essential.

They lived in fortified walled villages—not only to guard against external threats but also to foster mutual support within the clan, sharing resources and standing together against external pressures. They formed tightly woven kinship networks to resist competitors in unfamiliar lands and ensure the survival and continuity of their lineage. Their closed lifestyle, with limited interaction and intermarriage with outsiders, also preserved a thread of Hakka culture through the generations.

The Hakka philosophy of food is one of saltiness, savor, and endurance. In times of scarcity, they learned to stretch the value of a single piece of meat or a single vegetable. The rich, time-mellowed flavors of preserved mustard greens braised with pork carry the wisdom of generations, while the delicate craft of stuffed tofu reveals their deep respect for ingredients and their determination to waste nothing. These humble yet profound flavors reflect the very essence of the Hakka spirit—creating abundance from what is limited, and finding the fullest possibilities within the simplest means.

Like dandelions carried by the wind, the Hakka journeyed wherever the winds of life took them—and yet, wherever they settled, they took root and stood strong. But this was the face of the Hakka people before the dawn of the 21st century.



From Singular to Plural: The Shifting Identity of the Hakka

In the 21st century, the Hakka are no longer who they once were. In the past, they were known for their courage, frugality, and resilience—often working the land, mining, or building railroads, enduring physically demanding labor. Today, however, the global Hakka community embraces a wide range of professions. Generations of cultural exchange and migration have reshaped their identity, making the old labels that once defined Hakka culture no longer sufficient. In this new era, Hakka identity is more complex, multifaceted, and harder to pin down.

In today's globalized world, cultural boundaries are increasingly blurred and continually reshaped. Historically, in their ancestral homeland in China, the Hakka remained relatively isolated and conservative, with little contact with other cultural groups. This allowed them to preserve a more traditional and unified sense of Hakka identity. But as they migrated across regions and nations, their encounters and exchanges with local cultures continually reshaped who they were—transforming a once singular identity into a diverse and multifaceted sense of belonging.

Consider a Hakka descendant who grew up in Thailand, holds an Australian passport, married a Canadian, and now lives in Amsterdam. They're familiar with Thai cuisine, speak Thai, Hakka, and Mandarin, have a Western educational background, and navigate a cross-cultural marriage. When visiting relatives in Thailand, they love reminiscing about childhood memories. When meeting Taiwanese, they naturally switch to Mandarin. When encountering Malaysian Hakka, they speak Hakka. Yet at home, English is the primary language. This fluid switching between languages reflects their layered identities, which shift effortlessly depending on the people they meet and the context they're in. Still, "being Hakka" remains part of who they are—sometimes highlighted, sometimes tucked away. If you ask, "So, where are you from?" it's not a question with a simple answer; it's one that often lingers, inviting reflection.

Is this an identity crisis? Perhaps not. What is certain is that it's a product of globalization. Across the world, especially among younger generations, most Hakka carry multiple layers of identity, challenging the traditional notion that one can only have a single, fixed sense of belonging. Global Hakka navigate these multiple identities with ease, choosing when to express or downplay their Hakka identity depending on the situation—allowing them to move fluidly between different communities and conversations.

Another effect of globalization is the gradual marginalization of the Hakka language. Factors like intermarriage, national language policies, and smaller family sizes have reduced opportunities for younger generations to learn Hakka. "Can you still be considered Hakka if you don't speak the language?"—this is a shared question and challenge faced by Hakka communities around the world.

From "Sojourning" to "Coming Home"

In Hakka studies, scholars often examine the global Hakka, Taiwanese Hakka, Chinese Hakka, and Hong Kong Hakka as distinct groups. The global Hakka—shaped by repeated migrations and cross-border movements—carry fluid, multi-layered identities, with their sense of "Hakka-ness" continually being reshaped. In contrast, Taiwanese Hakka went through the Qing era, Japanese colonial rule, and the Kuomintang's Mandarin-only policies, until the post-martial-law "Return Our Mother Tongue" movement sparked a revival. Today, Taiwan has become one of the strongest centers for preserving Hakka culture. Meanwhile, Chinese and Hong Kong Hakka have each developed their own unique cultural contexts shaped by different historical, political, and economic forces.

Due to space constraints, this month's Mission Pathway draws on the work of Hakka scholars to help readers better understand the global and Taiwanese Hakka. The Hakka people's long history of migration—and their very name, meaning "guest families"—reflects a shared state of mind. Whether they are traditional Hakka or a new generation shaped by globalization and multiple identities, deep within remains a longing and search for "home."

We believe God can move the hearts of Hakka people from every background, and that the gospel—expressed in many forms—can reach Hakka communities around the world. Through it, they may come to a deeper understanding of their true identity: that all humanity are sojourners, longing for an ultimate home. The Holy Spirit will lead the Hakka from living as "guests" to truly "coming home."





Global Hakka Population Distribution



1 Japan p.8

The Hakka community in Japan lives quietly within the fabric of society. The Chongzheng Association, operating from just a single desk, serves as the link connecting Hakka people across the country.

2 France p.9

Hakka have quietly blended into the rhythm of French life, yet, like other Asian communities worldwide, they still carry the label of a “model minority.”

3 Tahiti p.11

In the mid-20th century, faced with the strict naturalization policies of the French colonial government, the thread of Hakka ancestral records began to blur, sparking a deep desire to trace their roots.

4 India p.12

Kolkata is home to India’s Hakka community, who built their livelihood on the leather trade. But the Sino-Indian border war completely changed the fate of the Hakka there.

5 Vietnam p.13

The Hakka of Bao Long District, Bien Hoa City, Dong Nai Province, are descendants of the defeated soldiers led by General Chen Shangchuan, who followed Koxinga after his failed anti-Qing campaign in Taiwan.

6 Peru p.14

Hakka introduced the Chinese wok and stir-fry techniques, preserving Hakka cuisine in a new way while also transforming Peru’s food culture.

7 Canada p.15

After the Sino-Indian war broke out, the situation for Chinese in India became increasingly difficult. Many Hakka migrated again, bringing Indian-Hakka cuisine to Toronto, Canada.

8 Thailand p.16

Hakka settled in Thailand due to 19th-century railway construction and wartime migrations. Today, under government assimilation policies and rapid modernization, the transmission of cultural heritage faces increasing challenges.

9 Indonesia p.18

In Banda Aceh, some Hakka converted to Islam, which meant they no longer possessed a “complete” Chinese identity—seen as a form of downward social mobility.

10 Malaysia p.19

In the late 20th century, Malaysia implemented the “New Economic Policy” to address poverty among the Malay population, but it deepened the Chinese community’s sense of deprivation and insecurity.

11 Taiwan p.37

Taiwan has a large Hakka population, which can be divided into six subgroups by dialect: Tingzhou, Raoping, Zhao’an, Sixian, Hailu, and Dabu.

Hidden in the Corners of Society

Hakka in Japan



“More than being Japanese, Taiwanese, or even Chinese, I feel I’m a Hakka.” — Kimiko Yo

Kimiko Yo, a Taiwanese-Hakka Japanese actress of remarkable talent, has won the Japan Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress three times. Her superb acting skills have made her a familiar face in the Japanese drama scene.

Before the 20th century, most Hakka in Japan came directly from China. After Japan colonized Taiwan, Taiwanese Hakka gradually became the mainstream among Hakka immigrants. Kimiko Yo’s family story mirrors the lives of many Taiwanese Hakka migrants of that era. Her grandfather left Taoyuan for Kobe, Japan, like many young Taiwanese who crossed to Japan at the time, eager to succeed in their careers.

The Hakka community in Japan lives quietly in the corners of society, with an estimated population of about 7,000 to 20,000, many of them social elites. They have no concentrated settlements, nor prominent landmarks like the Hakka associations of Southeast Asia. Instead, the Chongzheng Association run from a single desk, serves as the connecting link for Hakka across Japan.

As generations pass, Hakka identity in Japan is gradually fading. Zhou Ziqiu, president of the Kanto Chongzheng Association, puts it this way:

“The first generation has passed away, the second is elderly, the third is indifferent, and the fourth is assimilated.”

In other words, the wartime immigrants to Japan are long gone. The second generation active in Hakka affairs are now aged; the third generation knows about Hakka culture but shows little interest; and the fourth generation is thoroughly Japanese in identity.

Heavenly Father, You are at work not only in the present and the future, but You have always reigned sovereign over the past. You are the God who moves in history. Through the Bible You have given us, we see Your works and grasp Your grand design for both individuals and the world. In our journey of faith, You have never been absent. Nothing is by accident; You are always at work in our lives. May the younger generation of Japanese Hakka discover the joy of exploring history—learning to understand themselves through it, and seeing how the past has shaped who they are today. More than that, may they meet You in history—the supreme Creator—and weave their own life stories into Your great story, with Jesus Christ, who has come and will come again. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

From Boat People to Parisian Guests

Hakka in France I



On the streets of Paris and in the countryside of Provence, Hakka people have quietly blended into the rhythm of French life. You won't easily spot them—they are often hidden within the larger Chinese community in France.

There are about 30,000 Hakka in France, most originating from the Hakka heartlands in China or from former French colonies such as Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. The history of Hakka migration to France can be traced back to World War I, when the massive loss of manpower in Europe led France to recruit laborers from abroad, opening the door for Chinese migration. The largest wave of Hakka immigrants came in the mid-1970s, when communist forces swept across the Indochinese Peninsula. Many Hakka, facing political persecution, fled to France in rickety boats. Unlike many other immigrants, Hakka from Indochina often had received education under French colonial rule, enjoyed relatively good socioeconomic standing and cultural literacy, and spoke French—making them welcomed by the French government.

Hakka in France observe *gua-zi*—literally “hanging paper,” a traditional grave-sweeping practice—twice a year. They observe it once during the Qingming Festival and once on All Saints' Day*. On these occasions, Hakka organizations such as the Federation of Chongzheng Associations in France invite Taoist or Buddhist priests to conduct religious ceremonies, including scripture recitations and salvation rites. These two days not only express the Hakka value of honoring ancestors but also reflect a deep emotional connection to family and homeland.

*All Saints' Day (November 1) is an important Catholic holiday, also a nationwide public holiday in France. It is customary for the French to visit cemeteries and place flowers on the graves of deceased loved ones. The Hakka in France have adapted to this local custom while still preserving their unique traditions.

*Heavenly Father, we lift up the Hakka Christians in France to You. Because of their unique migration background, they have deep bonds with their fellow Hakka in France. We pray that You would use them to share Jesus with their compatriots in this foreign land. We pray also for the Chinese churches in France—that the Holy Spirit would open their eyes to the gospel needs of the Hakka, grant them a deeper understanding of Hakka culture, and inspire them to develop appropriate mission ministries among Hakka communities. We entrust the unique *gua-zi* tradition of the French Hakka to You. Grant missionaries wisdom to create a contextualized form of grave-sweeping rituals, so that French Hakka Christians can remember their family and homeland while also bearing witness to the hope of the faith. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*

The Other Side of the “Model Minority” Halo

Hakka in France II



The COVID-19 pandemic pried open the lid on racial discrimination that had long been simmering in France. A torrent of slurs and blatant acts of violence followed: a Vietnamese woman slapped in the street, a Chinese student forced off a train, Asian children spat on—and even extreme online calls to “beat up anyone caught studying Chinese.”

On October 29, 2020, a 19-year-old Chinese youth in Paris’s 19th district was punched and kicked while being cursed as a “dirty Chinaman.” The incident stirred heated discussion on social media. He was not the only victim; several similar attacks occurred that same year.

Anti-Asian sentiment did not begin with the pandemic. Although the French government has attempted to legislate against racial discrimination, in reality, incidents of bias and violence have continued to rise.

The Asian community has never been able to shake off the “model minority” label*. Former French President Nicolas Sarkozy once publicly praised Asians as “hardworking, studious, committed to French values—true role models.” Yet sociologists caution that such political praise can, paradoxically, fuel anti-Asian resentment. This highlights a deeper truth: whether praise or criticism, if based on stereotypes, it ultimately harms those concerned and deepens ethnic divides.

The shadows of exclusion lurking in the corners of a so-called civilized society stand in stark contrast to France’s ideals of liberty and reason. Anti-China sentiment, anti-Chinese prejudice, and anti-Asian discrimination are distinct concepts, yet all are closely intertwined with the experiences of the Hakka people.

*The term “model minority” may sound like praise, but it is dangerous—it is often used to compare ethnic groups, sow division, and imply that others are “less successful” through their own fault. At its core, it is still a form of prejudice.

Heavenly Father, in the Lord Jesus we catch a glimpse of love, goodness, grace, and wisdom. May the Lord’s beauty illuminate the lives of the French people, that they may once again experience Your saving grace. Father God, in Your boundless love You created every person on earth. May the Holy Spirit broaden the vision of the French people, so they may understand that every person—regardless of race—is made in God’s image and possesses dignity, beauty, and worth. May the French government enact sound policies to address racial discrimination and safeguard all Asians in France, including the 30,000 Hakka people. May French society open its heart to listen to those wounded by prejudice, and build bridges of peace so that people learn to forgive and be forgiven, working together to live out liberty, equality, and fraternity. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

Roots Sought, Roots Unfound

Hakka in Tahiti



Photo by zhang kaiyv by Unsplash

Hakka immigration to Tahiti began in 1865, when the French colonial government, seeking to develop its cotton industry, brought in a group of contract laborers from Guangdong*. Later, more Hakka people arrived in pursuit of a better life. Industrious and frugal, they started as dock workers and gradually branched into the restaurant business, retail trade, and agriculture. The Hakka quickly accumulated wealth, built family enterprises, and grew in number, becoming a significant community in Tahiti.

By the mid-20th century, facing the strict naturalization policies of the French colonial government, the Hakka had to make practical choices—only by receiving a French-language education and obtaining the necessary qualifications could they secure better educational resources and development opportunities for the next generation. Under the new nationality law, Hakka surnames were required to be adapted into a “French-style Hakka surname” and paired with an authentic French first name. For example, the Hakka surname “Lai” was changed to “Laille.”

Once surnames were assimilated into French form, the threads of family genealogy began to blur, stirring in the Hakka a yearning to reconnect with their roots. Many Hakka in Tahiti tried to retrace their lineage by studying abroad or visiting relatives, but upon setting foot in their ancestral homeland in China, they found that the reality no longer matched their imagination. “When we got there, it felt like everything had changed. We spoke French, not Hakka, and not Mandarin either. It was hard to communicate with our relatives in China—we didn’t even know what to talk about.”

This sense of loss from an unsuccessful search for roots is, as scholars have described, like the soul of a wanderer, unable to find rest.

*Most came from Xin’an and Bao’an in the Huizhou region.

Heavenly Father, comfort the Hakka in Tahiti in their sorrow and disappointment from an unfulfilled search for roots. Grant them grace to navigate these complex emotions, and give them courage from You to keep moving forward—embracing the joys and sorrows, the laughter and tears of life’s journey. May they see Your love, just as You have promised to uphold those who stumble and carry those who are burdened. Heal their wounds, fill the emptiness in their hearts, and let the Holy Spirit guide them to know Jesus and return to the Father’s house. We ask that the French government reexamine past naturalization policies, face this chapter of history, and take responsibility for it. May the Hakka in Tahiti have the courage to uncover old wounds and enter into dialogue with the government, so that reconciliation may become possible. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

The Most Authentic Hakka

Hakka in India



India, an ancient land that gave rise to a brilliant civilization, is often remembered by the Chinese through the story of Faxian's pilgrimage in search of Buddhist scriptures. Yet few realize that a Hakka community has been thriving here for more than two centuries.

Kolkata is home to the largest Hakka settlement in India. In the 18th century, the British East India Company launched the opium trade with China, making Kolkata a key center of Sino-Indian commerce and opening the way for migration. Seizing the opportunity, a group of Hakka from Meixian in Guangdong crossed the seas and settled in India.

The Hakka in India built their livelihood on leather. The leather industry was lucrative, but because it involved handling animal carcasses and highly polluting tanning processes, it was shunned by India's higher castes, while the impoverished Dalits lacked the capital to run it. The Hakka, spotting the business opportunity, gradually built a leather supply chain, with their products exported as far as Europe, the Middle East, and Russia.

The 1962 Sino-Indian border war drastically changed the fate of the Hakka in India. An anti-Chinese wave swept the country, and the Hakka came under strict government surveillance; some were even confined to internment camps. Many fled to Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Canada.

Today, only just over 2,000 Hakka remain in Kolkata. They take pride in believing that the Hakka dialect they speak is the most authentic. The legend of Tong Atchew, the "Pioneer Ancestor in India"* and the annual spring worship at the Tangyuan Bogong Temple are unique cultural traditions of the Indian Hakka, embodying their reverence for their ancestors.

*Legend has it that Tong Atchew, resourceful and courageous, settled in India under the protection of the gods, becoming the pioneering forebear of the Hakka there.

Heavenly Father, in a foreign land, the Hakka in India hold tightly to their traditional beliefs as they seek identity and belonging. Gently lay Your hand upon theirs, that they may loosen their grip on the security they cling to, and see that faith in Christ is another path. Lord, use Hakka Christians in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Canada to open the door of the gospel to their Hakka relatives in India, bearing a beautiful testimony of being both Hakka and Christian. We also pray for the caste system in India. Holy Spirit, guide the people of India to know You, Father God, and be reconciled to You. May they experience the depth of Your love that reaches all, renewing their minds and enabling them to see India's ancient caste system through new eyes. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

Changing Faith Is No Easy Matter

Hakka in Vietnam



Photo by Sgnpkd on Wikimedia Commons

Chinese residential settlements in Dong Nai Province

In Bao Long district of Bien Hoa city, Dong Nai province, there are about 1,200 Hakka. They are descendants of the defeated soldiers of General Chen Shangchuan of Longmen, who fled with Koxinga after his failed resistance against the Qing in Taiwan. These Hakka migrants carried with them the handicraft traditions of Huiyang, Guangdong, and established an Ancestral Masters' Temple to honor the three patron masters of woodwork, stonework, and ironwork—Lu Ban, Yuchi Gong, and Wu Ding. Through their craftsmanship, the Hakka became one of the few elite communities in the region.

However, with Vietnam's rapid industrialization, the traditional handicrafts that sustained the Hakka gradually declined. While other Chinese communities (such as Cantonese and Fujianese) prospered through the international rice trade, the Hakka's economic status steadily weakened, and the gap between them and other groups grew more apparent.

Facing the decline of their traditional industries, the Bao Long Hakka adjusted their traditions in order to maintain commercial ties with other Chinese communities. They rebranded their once distinctly Hakka Ancestral Masters' Temple into the Ancient Temple of Mazu, integrating into mainstream Chinese culture.

Yet, changing faith is no easy matter. Step inside the so-called "Ancient Temple of Mazu," and you will find that the main hall still enshrines the three ancestral masters, not the sea goddess Mazu. The altars of Mazu and Guan Gong are instead placed on the left and right sides of the hall. This perhaps reveals the deep emotional attachment the Hakka still feel toward their traditional faith, which they find hard to relinquish.

Heavenly Father, as the Bao Long Hakka in Vietnam face the pressures of industrialization and the challenges of economic transformation, they have bravely adapted their way of life, showing remarkable resilience. May the Bao Long Hakka come under Your name, and in Your kingdom may they use this adaptability to become, like Paul, "all things to all people," humble yet powerful messengers of the gospel. Lord, we intercede for the missionaries who are about to serve or are already serving among the Bao Long Hakka. Grant them heavenly wisdom and discernment, that they may understand and respect the deep cultural and traditional sentiments of the Hakka, and share the gospel in ways that the Hakka can truly understand. May the seed of truth take root, sprout, and bear fruit in this land. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

Stir-Fried Beef with French Fries?

The Hakka in Peru



Photo by WikiHes on Wikimedia Commons

Peruvian Stir-Fried Beef Tenderloin

When the Hakka bring their culture into a new land, they are not always assimilated into the local culture. Instead, they may flexibly adapt, blend, or innovate, continuing Hakka culture in fresh ways.

In the mid-19th century, after Peru abolished slavery, more than 100,000 Chinese (including many Hakka) migrated there to replace African slaves. They labored in sugarcane plantations, on the Andes railroads, and in guano mines, or worked as household servants and cooks—shaping Peru’s food culture in lasting ways.

The Hakka introduced the Chinese wok and stir-fry techniques, giving rise to Lomo Saltado—stir-fried beef and vegetables paired with French fries. Though this combination might seem unusual, it has become one of Peru’s most beloved dishes. To meet local tastes and needs, Hakka migrants gradually created a distinct culinary tradition known as Chifa.

Chifa, a word that echoes the Mandarin phrase “chi fan” (meaning “eat”), refers to restaurants serving Chinese-style food. Today, Chifa restaurants are everywhere in Peru, filled with local patrons. Compared with traditional Chinese cuisine, this Peruvian-Chinese food is generally sweeter and incorporates local ingredients such as Peruvian chili (Ají Amarillo), red onions, and tamarind.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for blessing the land of Peru through the wisdom and hard work of the Hakka. With their woks and culinary skills, they have nourished countless Peruvians. In Chifa restaurants, we see how You bring together people of different cultures around the same table. Lord, we earnestly pray that these Hakka immigrants—so skilled in creating food and bearing Your beautiful image—may come to know You, the Lord who gives the bread of life. Once, Adam and Eve fell through a wrong act of eating, but in Your infinite love, You gave Your only Son, Jesus Christ, so that in Him we may eat of His bread and drink of His cup, and receive salvation. May the Hakka in Peru feast with You, taste the sweetness of salvation, and continue to bless people of many nations through food. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

Curry Powder Meets Soy Sauce

The Hakka in Canada



Photo by Vikramdewangan22889 on Wikimedia Commons

Chili Chicken

Most Hakka in Canada did not immigrate directly from China. Instead, many arrived as second- or even third-wave migrants from Mauritius, Indonesia, South Africa, the Caribbean, and other regions. Beginning in the 1950s, as former British colonies and territories gained independence, the rise of nationalism and the coming to power of new governments forced many Hakka minorities to leave.

After the outbreak of the Sino-Indian War in 1962, life for Chinese communities in India became increasingly difficult, and many were compelled to migrate elsewhere. A large number of Hakka chose Canada, bringing Indian-Hakka cuisine with them to Toronto. This culinary tradition blends Indian spices such as curry powder, garam masala, and dhana jeera (coriander and cumin powder) with Chinese cooking methods and ingredients like stir-frying and soy sauce, resulting in a uniquely distinctive cuisine.

Signature dishes at Indian-Hakka restaurants include Manchurian Chicken, Chili Chicken, and Hakka Noodles. Many restaurants continue to experiment and develop new creations, such as Masala Fish, which has become a specialty at several establishments. Today, there are about 70 Indian-Hakka restaurants in Canada, with nearly 80% concentrated in Toronto. If you live in Toronto—or plan to visit Canada—why not step into an Indian-Hakka restaurant and enjoy a cross-cultural culinary journey?

Heavenly Father, You are the source of all cultures and creativity, the giver of every good and perfect gift. As Hakka chefs in Canada blend Indian spices with Chinese cooking methods in their kitchens, we pray that You reveal Yourself to them. May they experience Your wonderful guidance in the cooking process, sense Your design in the natural order as ingredients transform, and recognize Your abundant grace in the creation of new dishes. We pray that You use the inventive cuisine of Indian-Hakka restaurants not only to satisfy hunger but also to bring healing and rest to weary hearts. In the midst of anxious and busy lives, may people pause, savor the joy of food, and celebrate Your creation at the table. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

Where Do We Come From?

The Hakka in Thailand



In the 19th century, Thailand began building railways to promote economic development, bringing in large numbers of Hakka laborers. After the Taiping Rebellion, remnants of Hong Xiuquan's defeated Hakka soldiers drifted to Malaysia and later migrated northward to work in southern Thailand.

The Hakka in Thailand are often divided into "mountain Hakka" and "half-mountain Hakka." The "mountain Hakka" came mainly from Meixian in Guangdong, a mountainous region, and spoke the Meixian dialect of Hakka, also known as the Jiaying dialect. The "half-mountain Hakka," whose ancestral homes were closer to the coast in Fengshun, Jiexi, and Jieyang, lived near the Teochew people. Frequent intermarriage between the two groups led to a Hakka dialect heavily influenced by Teochew. In addition, another group of Hakka came from Maoming, Xinyi, and Gaozhou in Guangdong. Most of them entered southern Thailand through Malaysia to work in the rubber plantations. They maintained close ties with relatives and friends in Malaysia but had less contact with Hakka communities in central and northern Thailand.

Hakka associations have long sustained the ethnic identity of Thailand's Hakka. Despite government assimilation policies, modernization, and the shaping of Thai nationalism, these associations have worked hard to preserve and transmit Hakka culture. Yet one major challenge remains: how to raise up a new generation of leaders to continue their mission.

The Taiping Rebellion and the Hakka

The Hakka, in their search for survival, migrated widely and often found themselves competing with local majority groups for resources. This put them on the social and economic margins. However, these very circumstances laid the groundwork for revolutionary consciousness. During the spread of the Taiping movement, large numbers of Hakka joined in, becoming a driving force in the rebellion.

Heavenly Father, in the midst of Thailand's assimilation policies, rapid modernization, and the rise of nationalism, we thank You for preserving the Hakka associations as vital bridges that connect Hakka communities and sustain their cultural traditions and ethnic identity. We pray that You prepare opportunities for the Hakka in Thailand to encounter followers of Christ in their daily lives and workplaces. May Your redeeming grace reach them, and may they experience the fullness of life in Jesus Christ and grow in their desire to know You more deeply. We also pray for the generational differences among the Hakka. The older generation insists on Hakka language as the marker of identity, while the younger generation, growing up in modern Thai society, lacks the environment to learn or use it. Lord, help both generations to understand each other: that Hakka identity is not only about language, but also about treasuring and passing on their rich cultural heritage. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

The Diversity of Hakka Communities in Thailand



Chiang Rai

Most Hakka here are “half-mountain Hakka,” originally from Fengshun in Guangdong. Because of the province’s proximity to the Chinese border, they frequently interacted with Yunnan ethnic minorities. During the Thai government’s ban on Chinese-language education, Hakka would travel to Myanmar to study Chinese education.

Lampang

Lampang, the second largest city in northern Thailand after Chiang Mai, has a sizable Chinese population and a strong sense of competition among ethnic groups. This made Hakka identity especially important for the local community.

Phrae

The Fengshun Hakka Association was established within the Charoen Sin School. In earlier times, Hakka associations often simultaneously founded schools, hospitals, temples, and cemeteries to meet the community’s many needs. Even today, some associations continue to run schools and remain committed to promoting Chinese-language education.

Nakhon Pathom

The Hakka association here still preserves many cultural artifacts of the “Hakka lion.” Unlike the traditional Chinese lion dance, the Hakka lion has a square-shaped mouth and a cuter appearance, symbolizing the Hakka people’s unity in resisting outside threats and protecting their homeland. Influenced by Teochew traditions, the Hakka in Nakhon Pathom primarily worship Pun Tao Kong (the local earth deity).

Bangkok

Leaders of Hakka associations are mostly retired businesspeople and entrepreneurs. They travel across Thailand to give speeches, appealing to the younger generation to revitalize Hakka identity. Some have even funded the establishment of Hakka research societies, supporting Thai scholars in conducting Hakka studies.

Ratchaburi

Most Hakka here are farmers or involved in the textile and timber trades. In small villages such as Huay Kra Box, ancestral worship, traditional Hakka wedding ceremonies, and funeral rites are still observed, and people in their forties and fifties still speak Hakka fluently. However, with modernization, younger generations have moved to urban areas, making the transmission of the Hakka language increasingly difficult.

Hat Yai

Most Hakka here are “half-mountain Hakka.” Community pioneers such as Xie Shusi and Xu Jinrong attracted many Hakka to Hat Yai to engage in rubber planting, tin mining, and retail businesses. Today, much of Hat Yai’s commerce remains dominated by the Chinese community.

Betong

Betong is home to about 10,000 Hakka, where both the Hakka language and Chinese are well maintained. The Hakka here migrated from China to Malaysia and later moved to Thailand, where they contributed significantly to the prosperity of the local economy through rubber cultivation.



Becoming Muslim

The Hakka in Indonesia



Photo by Michael Lusk on Flickr

“You converted to Islam? That’s the faith of barbarian and scoundrels! You are Hakka—this is betraying your ancestors!” Faced with my mother’s angry rebuke, I lowered my head in silence.

In Banda Aceh, becoming Muslim as a Hakka meant losing one’s “complete” Chinese identity. It was seen as a downward step in social status, bringing pressure from both family and the wider Chinese community.

This aversion toward a Muslim identity traces back to the Dutch colonial era and its racial segregation policy^{*}. The Dutch East India Company granted the Chinese in Indonesia certain privileges, placing them above the native population. This not only blocked the Chinese from integrating into Indonesian society, but also planted in the minds of locals the stereotype that Chinese were arrogant, selfish, and driven by profit.

After Indonesia’s independence, a series of restrictive policies further deepened the divide between the Chinese and wider society. These included banning Chinese-language newspapers and associations, forcing name changes into Indonesian, prohibiting the use of Chinese, closing Chinese schools, and even forbidding public celebrations of traditional festivals. It was not until 2006, with the passage of the Indonesian Citizenship Law, that Chinese Indonesians regained legal freedom.

In 2008, the tsunami swept away the colors of Aceh, leaving much of the region a gray wasteland of mud and rubble. Yet human relationships began to quietly shift. Some Hakka crossed ethnic barriers and built friendships with locals—hiring Acehnese workers, or frequenting coffee shops run largely by Acehnese.

^{*}Under Dutch colonial rule, society was divided into three tiers: Europeans at the top, “foreign Orientals” in the middle, and indigenous Indonesians at the bottom. Chinese, as “foreign Orientals,” enjoyed certain privileges such as selling opium, operating gambling houses, and running pawnshops.

The Prevalence of Hakka

In Aceh, 98% of the Chinese community speaks Hakka, regardless of whether their ancestral home is Meixian, Guangdong.

Heavenly Father, Your works go far beyond what we can grasp or imagine. The tsunami brought unbearable grief and loss, yet in that moment You opened the door of reconciliation, allowing Hakka and indigenous people to form genuine connections in everyday life. Lord, we ask You to heal the ethnic divisions left by Dutch colonial rule and to soothe the wounds inflicted by Indonesia’s discriminatory policies toward the Hakka. May Your love fill the hearts of Hakka people, teaching them to view their past suffering through Your eyes. Grant them strength to forgive, accept, and rebuild relationships with their Muslim neighbors. We especially lift up Hakka Muslims in Indonesia—amid persecution, may they encounter Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, and discover true belonging and peace. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Pull and Push

The Hakka in Malaysia



Photo by Darshan Patel on Unsplash

In the 19th century, China—the so-called “Sick Man of East Asia”—was carved up by foreign powers. A wave of Hakka migrants headed south to work in the tin mining industry, filling the demand for cheap labor in Southeast Asia. “My parents paid for their passage using personal and family savings, following the paths laid out by relatives and friends, and sought livelihoods in Malaya. They settled in Buchan Town, a Hakka enclave founded by tin miners from Dongguan, Guangdong. Later, they recruited more relatives and acquaintances from China to work there.”

Migration was often regulated by the “push-pull theory.” At the end of the 20th century, Malaysia implemented the New Economic Policy to address poverty among the Malay population. While the policy gave Malays priority in education, social welfare, and employment, it also intensified ethnic tensions, with Chinese often blamed as the cause of Malay poverty. Chinese were restricted in education, culture, political rights, and business opportunities, and were even subtly excluded from public office. The national university quota system prevented many qualified Chinese students from attending public universities. Meanwhile, the gradual Islamization policies further deepened the sense of insecurity among the Chinese.

As a result, many skilled Malaysian Chinese migrated to “pull countries” such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States. The Hakka were part of this wave of “re-emigration.”

Heavenly Father, many Malaysian Hakka have embarked once again on the path of migration, traveling far from home in search of new opportunities. In a generation where countries are increasingly tightening immigration policies, we ask You to watch over these scattered children of the diaspora, providing for all their needs. May the Hakka not only find security and stability in new lands, but, more importantly, may they encounter You along the journey of life. We pray for the Malaysian government; grant the leaders wisdom and justice to formulate fair and reasonable policies, removing barriers and prejudices between ethnic groups. Stir the hearts of young Malaysians studying abroad to return and contribute to their homeland. Bless Malaysia to become a nation of ethnic harmony, transparent governance, economic prosperity, and a pleasant place to live. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

A Collaborative Immigration Project

The Hakka of Sabah, Malaysia



A Basel Christian Church in Malaysia

The history of Hakka migration to Sabah, Malaysia, differs from the widely known “coolie trade”^{*}; it was a coordinated migration project involving missionaries and foreign businessmen.

In 1881, British merchants established the “North Borneo Chartered Company” in Sabah. To develop large tracts of land, they began recruiting Chinese laborers. At the time, Basel missionaries working in Guangdong’s Hakka areas, including Rudolf Lechler, were assisting those who had survived the failed Taiping Rebellion (many of whom were Hakka Christians) in evading Qing persecution. Lechler collaborated with the Chartered Company, whose immigration terms were very generous: free passage, land and housing rights, seeds and tools for cultivation, and monetary loans, attracting dozens of families to Sabah to farm the land.

Hakka Christians arrived in North Borneo with little more than their faith and determination. They laid the foundation for Sabah’s future social and economic development and established numerous churches in the region. Today, the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia has more than 170 congregations in Sabah, with approximately 50,000–60,000 members. They even overcame the Hakka’s traditionally insular tendencies, sharing the gospel with indigenous Kadazan-Dusun communities, gradually expanding their reach worldwide. They actively engage in cross-cultural missions, organizing short-term mission teams, discipleship training, and sending missionaries to China, Mauritius, Madagascar, and various parts of Southeast Asia.

^{*}In the 19th–20th centuries, many Chinese peasants or fishermen from impoverished rural areas were deceived by recruitment agencies to serve as laborers overseas, meeting the labor demands of Western colonies.

Heavenly Father, thank You for letting us learn about the history of Hakka missions in Malaysia. The Hakka are often called a “hard soil” for the gospel, yet in history we see Your tangible and wondrous work. Though Hakka Christians were scattered under persecution—like the disciples dispersed after Stephen’s martyrdom in Acts—they ended up blessing the land of Malaysia. They not only overcame the Hakka’s inward-looking tendencies but also initiated cross-cultural mission work. May this history continue to be shared and preserved, rekindling our passion for cross-cultural missions and strengthening our faith in You. May God continue to use every congregation and member of the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia to serve the world with the heart of Christ. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

The Basel Mission and the Encounter with the Hakka

History of Hakka Missions



Photo by 客家文化發展中心 on 開放博物館

Inside pages of the Hakka-Chinese Dictionary

The encounter between the Basel Mission and the Hakka people is thanks to the linguistically gifted missionary, Karl Gützlaff.

Gützlaff entered the Berlin Theological Seminary at the age of 18, and six years later he set out for Java to begin his missionary journey. His travels spanned Singapore, Hong Kong, China, and Malaysia, and he became fluent in Malay, Chinese, Minnan, Cantonese, Teochew, and Hakka. He wrote frequently to various European mission societies, encouraging them to bring the gospel to Asia. The Basel Mission responded to his zeal. From 1846 to 1849, the Basel Mission sent 62 teams comprising 188 missionaries to Hakka regions in Guangdong, leaving an invaluable mark on the history of Hakka missions.

The Basel Mission provided the Hakka with free education, medical care, and social welfare, helping this socially marginalized group improve their living conditions and social status. They established girls' schools with the teaching principles that "all are equal before God," "women are essential to supporting families and society," and "women have the right to education," thereby liberating Hakka women long constrained by a male-centered culture.

To better understand Hakka culture and communicate with the Hakka people, Basel missionaries worked on compiling Hakka-English dictionaries, Hakka-language teaching materials, and periodicals. These resources, along with the regular mission reports submitted to the society, became the first-hand historical materials for later research on the Hakka.

Heavenly Father, we give thanks for the dedication of the Basel missionaries in Hakka regions. Following Jesus' example, they sat alongside the poor and cared for the Hakka people through many practical actions. We thank You for the missionary work of that time; these missionaries not only spread the gospel but also, unexpectedly, preserved invaluable Hakka historical and linguistic materials for future generations, enabling today's academic research and helping the Hakka sustain their culture. Lord, we pray that You would continue to raise up more workers who love the Hakka in our time, helping them reach Hakka communities around the world in innovative ways. May the Holy Spirit move in the hearts of the Hakka, bringing spiritual revival among them, so that more Hakka may experience Your great love. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Do the Hakka come from the Central Plains?

The Origins of the Hakka People



Photo by 颐园新居 on Wikimedia Commons

Many people firmly believe that the Hakka originated from China's Central Plains. However, this view only gradually took shape in the 20th century. At that time, a book studying the ethnic groups of Guangdong Province suggested that the Hakka were not of Han Chinese descent, which provoked strong backlash from Hakka elites. Figures such as Huang Zunxian, Qiu Fengjia, and Lu Tsou immediately established the Hakka Research Association to respond through the written word, vigorously asserting that the Hakka were pure Han Chinese who had migrated south from the Central Plains.

In 1920, tensions flared again when World Geography, published by the Shanghai Commercial Press, described the Hakka as a savage, backward people. Once more, the Hakka rose to defend their Han identity. They were mockingly called “𪛗厝”¹, a derogatory pun implying they were not fully human. As newcomers, the Hakka constantly faced scorn and ridicule from local populations, resulting in persistent survival anxieties.

So, do the Hakka come from the Central Plains? Are they truly descendants of the Han? Scholars have yet to reach a definitive conclusion. Some argue that Hakka women's lack of foot-binding suggests a non-Han lineage. Others, based on linguistic analysis, propose that the Hakka are actually sinicized She people².

The formation of the Hakka community took a long time. After migrating to the mountainous regions of Guangdong, Fujian, and Jiangxi, they interacted with local populations, eventually earning the name “Hakka.” Tracing their exact origins remains extremely difficult.

¹ “𪛗厝” is the first-person pronoun “I” in Hakka. Locals deliberately replaced the “𪛗 ” with “𪛗 ” to mock them.

² Most minority groups in southern China speak a Chinese dialect close to Hakka called the She language. This is different from the language of the She people, which is a branch of Miao languages.

Heavenly Father, the Hakka worked hard to defend their Central Plains heritage, yet behind this effort lies the survival anxiety of being marginalized and discriminated against. We believe You fully understand the Hakka's suffering, for Your Son was also despised and rejected by the world. You are the God of the oppressed; You delight in justice, lifting the poor from the dust and raising the needy from the filth. May the Hakka come to know that You are their God, and in Your eyes, their identity is noble, shining like stars in the sky. May governments worldwide receive Hakka people residing in their lands with fairness, justice, and inclusiveness. May the Hakka gain a renewed understanding of their identity: that all people in this world are sojourners, and only the coming new heaven and new earth will be their true homeland. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Is Frugality a Virtue?

Hakka Cultural Labels



Frugality is a common trait among Chinese immigrants, but it is a particular point of pride for the Hakka. The epitaph of renowned Hakka writer Han Suyin's great-grandfather reads: "Never forget the hardships of humble beginnings, nor the struggles of our ancestors in building their livelihood; let filial piety, diligence, frugality, and integrity be the foundation of life." Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's founding Prime Minister and himself of Hakka descent, not only governed the nation with frugality but also embraced it as a personal principle. His daughter, Lee Wei Ling, once remarked: "Father taught me that frugality is a virtue."

Hakka people avoid wasting food, believing that waste invites divine punishment. In Calcutta, even when Hakka observed Cantonese families growing wealthy—hiring servants, eating with ivory chopsticks, and covering tables with tablecloths—they still adhered to a frugal lifestyle, working diligently to maintain their households. Such habits have often drawn teasing from outsiders, who labeled them either poor or stingy.

However, over time, this spirit of frugality has shifted across generations. Older Hakka still uphold frugality as a virtue and remember the hardships of earlier days; yet most younger Hakka find it difficult to resonate with this cultural label.

Heavenly Father, the Hakka people, who migrated later within China, were often forced to settle in the harsh mountain regions. Scattered across the world, many endured great hardship—some as victims of the piglet trade, others as pioneers cultivating new lands. These painful memories of the past shaped the older generation's frugality, but also made them resilient in the face of adversity. Lord, we pray that the gospel will renew the hearts of the older Hakka, helping them see that You are the God of abundant grace, the One they can fully rely upon. Teach them that to enjoy life in moderation is also an act of worship—resting in You and rejoicing in Your beautiful creation. Every Hakka person carries a unique life story; grant us grace to move beyond stereotypes, so that we may love and understand each one as You do. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Brave and Fearless

Hakka Cultural Labels



“Bravery and fearlessness” is one of the most distinctive hallmarks of the Hakka people. The Punti-Hakka Clan Wars of the mid-19th century stand as a major historical witness to the steadfast and unyielding spirit of Hakka ancestors.

The Punti-Hakka Clan Wars (1854–1867) arose from conflicts between Hakka migrants and the native Cantonese population. As the Hakka population grew rapidly, the earlier settlers perceived them as a threat. Though exact casualty numbers are not recorded, scholars estimate that over one million Hakka were killed or injured, and many were forced to migrate elsewhere. The hostility did not end there—it extended overseas to Malaysia and North America. In Malaysia, the rivalry between the Ghee Hin and Hai San secret societies escalated into the Larut Wars; in California, violent clashes broke out between Hakka associations and the Cantonese Sam Yup Association.

Adversity shaped the people and molded the identity of the group. Early Hakka not only faced hostility and exclusion from other Chinese dialect groups, but also had to start afresh in unfamiliar lands. These harsh circumstances forged in them a spirit of being “brave and fearless.” In Malaysia’s town of Beruas, this cultural trait is still alive—when grandchildren show timidity, their grandparents will say: “Not afraid of heaven, not afraid of earth—what is there to fear?” In their eyes, fear was simply “useless.”

Heavenly Father, the Punti-Hakka Clan Wars left “bravery and fearlessness” as a lasting cultural mark on the Hakka people. The older generation is eager to pass down this spirit to the next. Yet we ask that the Hakka may also come to know You as the God who welcomes the full range of human emotions. The Psalms are filled with cries of fear, regret, complaint, sorrow, pain—even curses—reminding us that You created us with the capacity to rejoice and grieve, to laugh and to weep. Life will always bring deep emotions and complex realities, but may the Hakka learn to name their feelings, understand their place, and in the storms of emotion, encounter Your presence, care, healing, and restoration. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

A Language on the Brink of Death

The Survival Crisis of the Hakka Language



According to a UNESCO report, half of the world's 6,700 languages could vanish by the end of this century. For Hakka, however, the crisis had already begun in the last century.

Due to national language policies*, population migration, globalization, and intermarriage across cultures, fewer and fewer families around the world—including in China—still use Hakka at home. Within just two or three generations, the language could vanish altogether. But if one cannot speak or understand Hakka, can one still claim to be Hakka? This is a question that weighs heavily on the hearts of Hakka people everywhere.

The linguist David Crystal once observed: "When a language has no more speakers, it dies." Languages resemble ecosystems: the greater the diversity, the richer humanity's understanding of the world and of each other, and the stronger our civilization becomes. A language, through its grammar and vocabulary, carries the weight of history—like a grandparent's treasured diary or a few words scrawled on the back of an old photograph. When a language disappears, the world loses not just a means of expression but an entire people's shared memory.

What does it feel like to lose one's mother tongue? A Khoikhoi person from South Africa once said: "It feels like I was raised by strangers, because I cannot speak my mother's language."

*For example, Singapore's "Speak Mandarin" campaign or the promotion of English.



Did You Know?

The Hakka language is rich in regional dialects, such as Dongguan, Sixian (Four Counties), Huiyang, and Xingning. Some varieties diverge so greatly in pronunciation that they are mutually unintelligible.

*Heavenly Father, from one man
You made all nations, and under
Your blessing You determined their
appointed times and the boundaries
of their lands. In doing so, You filled
the earth with a diversity of cultures.
You delight in the richness of human
expression, and in the vision of the
New Jerusalem, the Apostle John saw
a vast multitude from every nation,
tribe, people, and language. We long
for the Hakka people of every dialect to
be among them. Lord, we ask You to
provide the resources needed for the
revival of the Hakka language and to
inspire scholars and communities to
join hands in preserving this treasure.
May governments adjust their
language policies so that Hakka people
have greater opportunities to learn
and pass on their mother tongue. May
the translation of the Bible into Hakka
dialects continue, so that Hakka people
everywhere may hear Your voice in
their own language. In the name of
Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.*

The Benefits of Globalization

Major Hakka Gatherings



The Hakka people dispersed from China to communities across the world, undergoing multiple waves of international migration. While adapting and integrating into local societies and interacting with diverse cultures, they also faced the challenge of transmitting Hakka traditions—most visibly, the younger generation’s gradual abandonment of the Hakka language. Yet the Hakka did not passively accept decline; instead, they leveraged the advantages of globalization, organizing large-scale Hakka events to connect communities worldwide and revitalize Hakka culture.

A striking example is the World Hakka Conference, hosted annually by the Hong Kong Tsung Tsin Association, attracting thousands of representatives from Hakka groups around the globe. The event spans an impressive range of activities, from cultural performances, literature, and cuisine to academic forums, business networking, and political debate. Comparable to a global sporting events, the conference not only raises the host nation’s international profile but also drives significant economic benefits—making it a prize many countries compete to host.

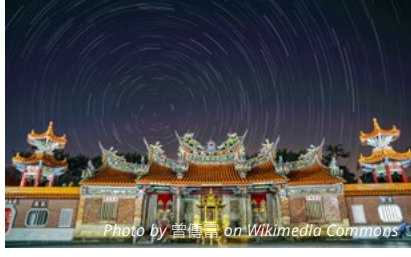
The Toronto Hakka Conference takes a different approach, focusing on bridging the language gap with younger, English-educated Hakka worldwide by helping them reconnect with Hakka history and culture. Another major global Hakka event is the Hakka Mother River Commemoration*, held annually in Changting, Fujian. This ritual draws Hakka people on pilgrimages to what is considered their “ancestral homeland,” where they offer incense and pay homage to their forebears.

*Although scholars dispute that Changting is the true homeland of the Hakka—considering it a historical distortion—participation in the “Mother River Commemoration” has nonetheless become a meaningful element of contemporary Hakka cultural practice.

Heavenly Father, we pray that these large-scale Hakka gatherings may not only revive Hakka culture and connect Hakka communities worldwide, but also serve as opportunities to advance Your kingdom. May the Holy Spirit guide Hakka Christians at these events to bear witness to Christ’s grace through their actions, and to build genuine, lasting friendships with fellow Hakka around the world. Lord, we ask that You use these relationships to draw more Hakka people into reconciliation with You through Jesus. We also lift up the younger generation of Hakka, praying that You preserve them from losing their roots amid the currents of globalization. As they inherit Hakka culture, may they also come to know You as the Lord who created all nations and peoples. May the next generation, in seeking their cultural origins, discover the ultimate foundation of life—Jesus Christ. In His holy name we pray, Amen.

God or ghost?

The Yimin Faith



Baozhongting Yimin Temple, Hsinchu County

During the early Qing period, society was fraught with instability. Some courageous Hakka stepped forward to help the government suppress local uprisings, while others became involved in conflicts with Hokkien communities, clashes with indigenous peoples, and campaigns against banditry. Many lost their lives in the struggle to defend their community's interests and preserve local order. They came to be honored by the people as Yimin—righteous individuals of courage and loyalty. The Hakka hold the Yimin in special reverence, venerating them as protective deities believed to bless the nation, safeguard the people, and ward off calamities. Public ceremonies in their honor are regularly held at Yimin temples, giving rise to a distinctive religious tradition unique to Hakka culture.

The individuals commemorated at Yimin temples differ from place to place. In Miaoli City, the Yimin Temple honors those who perished in the Lin Shuangwen Rebellion. The Dahu Yimin Temple is dedicated to settlers who perished during the arduous process of clearing and cultivating new lands. Meanwhile, the Nanhu Hu'an Temple venerates both those who fell in conflicts with indigenous peoples and individuals who died without descendants. Nanhu, situated deep in the inland mountains of Miaoli, was among the last and most challenging areas for Han settlers to develop, frequently suffering Indigenous raids¹ that claimed many lives.

Each year, from the eighteenth to the twentieth days of the seventh lunar month, ceremonies are held to honor the Yimin—those who bravely defended their homeland and gave their lives. In Hsinchu, the Yimin Temple has upheld for more than two centuries the tradition of rotating responsibility among fifteen allied villages², with rituals that include food offerings, Zhongyuan Festival ceremonies, the floating of water lanterns, sharing sweet porridge, and vibrant processions. The scale of these celebrations is remarkably grand.

Moreover, for modern Hakka people, the spirit of the Yimin extends beyond religious belief. It has become a symbol of Hakka social movements, inspiring the community to actively protect Hakka culture.

¹ These raids were known as “Chuciao”—a form of headhunting practiced among Taiwan's Indigenous peoples. The purpose was often to avenge the death of relatives or to settle disputes, rooted in the belief that ancestral spirits would grant the righteous the opportunity to take an enemy's head.

² The temple leadership in Hsinchu invites Hakka communities from Hsinchu and Taoyuan to take turns hosting the Yimin ceremonies.

Heavenly Father, the Hakka people honor the Yimin as heroes who defended their homeland and gave their lives to uphold order. Over time, they have come to worship the Yimin as deities. Today, the spirit of the Yimin carries a new meaning—the same courage to protect the homeland now inspires Hakka communities in preserving their culture and revitalizing their language. Lord, teach us to understand the Hakka by first looking deeply into the cultural significance of their traditions—appreciating before we critique, and accepting before we reject. Grant wisdom and creativity to the Taiwanese church, that it may engage Hakka culture with respect and faithfulness to Scripture. May the church develop effective evangelistic strategies that bring the good news of salvation to every Hakka village and touch the hearts of every Hakka individual. We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Who exactly is “Ba’gung”?

Worship of “Ba’gung”



Photo by Outlookxp on Wikimedia Commons

Liyu Ba’gung Temple, Dongshi, Taichung, Taiwan

“Ba’gung” is the affectionate term Hakka people use for their male elders (great-uncles or paternal grandfathers) and is also a respectful title for the local Earth God. When meeting familiar or unfamiliar people on the streets or in neighborhoods, addressing someone as “Ba’gung” can win goodwill and create a sense of closeness. The Hakka people’s relationship with the Earth God is as intimate as that with their elders. In Hakka villages, along fields or irrigation ditches, it is common to see stone Ba’gung statues or Ba’gung shrines in tree-tops. People clasp their hands in prayer, sincerely saying “Ba’gung” to seek the deity’s protection.

In the agrarian society of the past, Hakka life was simple, and they firmly believed that the land was the source of all life. In the same way, Ba’gung worship was also uncomplicated—a single stone or the stump of a tree could serve as a symbol of Ba’gung’s presence. In more recent times, however, modern Hakka communities, unwilling to let Ba’gung remain exposed to the elements, have expanded the scale of their worship. What once began with simple stones, tree stumps, or small household shrines has grown into mid-sized Ba’gung temples, and in some places, even large temple complexes complete with dragon-guarded halls.

Every year during the transition from autumn to winter, Ba’gung temples in Zhudong, Hsinchu, organize “God-Repaying Processions” as offerings, thanking Ba’gung for protection over the past year. They also invite deities from nearby well-attended temples, such as incarnations of the King of the Three Mountains or Mazu, to come and watch the performances.

Heavenly Father, You are the true “Earth God” of the Hakka people—their ultimate protector and provider. May Your Holy Spirit open their eyes to see that stones and trees are not deities but the work of Your hands, testifying to Your beauty, craftsmanship, and glory. Help them to understand that it is You who send the rain and sunshine, ensuring bountiful harvests. You are the God who does not require human hands to serve Him and who does not dwell in temples made by hands, for You are Lord of all creation and lack nothing. May the Hakka recognize that You alone give life and meet every need. We pray that in their celebrations and festivals, they would move beyond giving thanks merely to Ba’gung, and instead come to worship You, the living God. Reveal Yourself, Lord, to the Hakka people—that they may know You as the One who created all nations from one source, placing the Hakka among the peoples of the world to display Your glory. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Protecting the Three Temples of the Tingzhou Hakka

Tingzhou Hakka People



Photo by Sdfery on Wikimedia Commons

Yinshan Temple

In the districts of Tamsui, Sanzhi, and Shimen in New Taipei City, there is a community of Tingzhou Hakka descendants whose ancestors migrated from Yongding County, Fujian Province, China. While most Tingzhou Hakka today no longer speak the Yongding Hakka dialect*, they continue to uphold their distinctive ancestral faith.

With the arrival of the Tamsui MRT, the area has rapidly urbanized, drawing in new residents and giving rise to rows of modern high-rise buildings. Yet among this wave of development stands a designated Grade II historic site—the Yinshan Temple. Built in 1823, the temple enshrines the Tingzhou Hakka's ancestral guardian, the Dingguang Ancient Buddha. Originally established as the Tingzhou Guild Hall to host fellow townsmen, it has since become a central place of worship and community identity for the Tingzhou Hakka.

In Sanzhi District stands the Minzhugong Palace Temple, dedicated to Mingfu, a man who distinguished himself in the imperial military examinations. According to tradition, when the Zhengde Emperor Zhu Houzhao traveled incognito, Mingfu rendered him great protection and service, earning widespread renown. After his death, he was honored and venerated as a deity.

Shimen's Temple of Eighteen Deities has an especially unusual origin story. During the mid-Qing dynasty, 17 men perished in a maritime accident. When the local Hakka buried them, a loyal dog leapt into the grave to join them in death. From then on, they were collectively remembered as the "Eighteen Deities."

*In Longtan, Pingzhen, and Bade in Taoyuan, as well as in Hukou Township in Hsinchu, a few Tingzhou Hakka families still preserve the Yongding Hakka dialect.

Heavenly Father, the story of Shimen's Temple of Eighteen Deities is a solemn reminder to the Hakka people of life's fragility and impermanence. We pray that the Holy Spirit would open the hearts of the Tingzhou Hakka to know You—the God who rules the seas and calms the storms. On the Sea of Galilee, You were with the disciples in their fear, preserving their lives; in the same way, may the Tingzhou Hakka experience Your power and love amid the storms of life. When they walk through darkness and cannot see the path ahead, when they are battered by winds and waves, let them discover that Your beloved Son, Jesus, is in the boat with them. Almighty Lord, may You lead the Tingzhou Hakka community to find true peace in Your grace, unshakable hope in Your presence, and their final rest in the safety of their heavenly home. We pray this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

The Hometown of Starfruit

Raoping Hakka People



Photo by Jaddy Liu on Unsplash

Golden mandarins hang heavy on the branches, waiting to be harvested before the Lunar New Year. Just as I reached out to pick one, an auntie beside me quickly called out, “Don’t cut the green ones! Their color looks bad—no one will buy them.”

High in the mountains of Zhuolan Township, Miaoli County, the landscape is covered with rows of thriving tankan mandarin trees. This small town, situated at the southern edge of Miaoli, is home to a large community of Raoping Hakka. Zhuolan has long been one of Taiwan’s most important fruit-producing regions, famed for its mandarins, grapes, pears, and other crops. Elders recall that from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s, nearly every household in Zhuolan cultivated starfruit, which brought prosperity to the town. One farmer chuckled as he pointed to his house and said, “That building was paid for by starfruit.” But prosperity faded. The devastating 921 Earthquake, followed by the widespread rumor that eating starfruit causes kidney disease, the fruit gradually lost its appeal.

At the heart of the community stands the century-old Jishu Temple, ancestral shrine of the Zhan clan. Its annual rituals not only strengthen kinship ties but also bear witness to the migration history of the Raoping Hakka. Their roots trace back to Raoping County in Guangdong Province, China. Because Raoping lay tucked in the northern mountains, life was harsh during the early Qing period, and many took the risk of crossing the sea to Taiwan. Today, while Raoping Hakka families are scattered across the island, Zhuolan remains their largest stronghold, with the Zhan clan forming the majority. Yet, like many rural towns in Taiwan, Zhuolan has struggled against the pressures of modernization, suffering heavy population loss as its young people leave in search of opportunities elsewhere.

Heavenly Father, from past to present, we thank You for how Zhuolan has nourished many Raoping Hakka families. Yet we see the challenges this land faces—young people moving away and rural life slowly fading. But our God does not forget Zhuolan. You watch over every corner of the earth. Lord, grant the pastors and missionaries here wisdom and creativity to preach the gospel in clear and simple ways. Through community care and various ministries, may the Raoping Hakka people come to know You—the Heavenly Father who has provided for them from beginning to end. Guide the local government and related agencies to develop effective policies that can revive the local economy. Stir the hearts of the youth, that they may see the value and potential of their hometown, and return to Zhuolan with skill and passion. We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Hakka in Yunlin, Taiwan

The Zhao'an Hakka People



Photo by Chi-Hung Lin on flickr

Few people realize that Yunlin, a county largely associated with Minnan people, is also home to Zhao'an Hakka communities.

Zhao'an Hakka have settled in Xiluo, Lunbei, and Erlun townships of Yunlin County, with ancestral roots in Zhao'an County, Fujian Province, China. Since the early Qing dynasty, they began migrating to Taiwan to open new farmland. Perhaps because many were bilingual—fluent in both the Zhao'an Hakka dialect and Minnan—they coexisted peacefully with their Minnan neighbors and thus attracted little outside attention.

To preserve kinship ties and honor their ancestors, the Zhang-Liao clan—the largest Zhao'an Hakka family in Yunlin—established Chongyuan Hall, an ancestral shrine in Futian Village, Xiluo. Over time, it became a central spiritual site for Zhao'an Hakka in Taiwan. During the spring and autumn ancestor rituals, family elders solemnly recite the Seven Inlaid Admonitions, reminding descendants to etch the ancestral teachings into their hearts. The very first admonition—"Born a Liao, die a Zhang; thus we are Zhang-Liao"—commemorates the story of Zhang Yuanzai*, the forefather who married into the Liao family. His legacy gave rise to the Zhang-Liao lineage and embodies the Zhao'an Hakka's enduring gratitude for their heritage.

Zhao'an Hakka culture is rich and diverse. Alongside martial arts, the "open-mouth lion" dance, and puppetry—the so-called "three treasures"—Xiluo's pickled and fermented foods stand out as a hallmark. In earlier days, almost every Zhao'an household made their own soy sauce, fermented black beans, pickled gourds, and fermented tofu. After settling in Taiwan, these highly skilled fermentation techniques became an important means of livelihood and eventually gave rise to Xiluo's renowned pickling and brewing industry.

*Over six hundred years ago, Zhang Yuanzai—the founding ancestor of the Zhang-Liao lineage—married into the household of Liao Sanjiulang. Out of gratitude for being treated as a true son by his father-in-law, Zhang instructed his descendants to bear the Liao surname during their lifetime, but to return to the Zhang lineage in death. From this came the saying: "Born a Liao, die a Zhang."

Heavenly Father, forgetfulness is woven into human nature. The Israelites forgot that You delivered them from Egypt, out of the house of slavery. At the foot of Mount Sinai, they forgot their covenant with You, fashioned a golden calf, and gave glory to an idol. Yet through the prophets, You faithfully reminded Your people not to forget Your benefits. Lord, the Zhao'an Hakka are a people who treasure gratitude and remembrance. Reveal Yourself to them, that they may know You are unlike any other—the eternal God who keeps covenant and shows steadfast love, the faithful God whose promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob remain unshaken even today. We pray this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Vegetable Trucks in Mountain Towns

Dapu Hakka People



Photo by Slices of Light on flickr

The first time I heard the song “Provincial Highway 8,” I was immediately drawn to its lively rhythm and pure, unadorned sound. A quick online search revealed that this folk rock song was written by someone of the Dapu Hakka.

The song is an original work by the Ming-Ge Vegetable Truck Band, which is well-known in Dongshi, Taichung. The band’s leader, Qiu Jialiang, along with his younger brother, drives a small white truck through this mountain town. Because transportation in the area was once inconvenient, their father started a mobile vegetable truck business so that residents could easily buy produce. Now in its second generation, this service has been running in Dongshi for nearly half a century—hence the band’s name.

The Dapu Hakka trace their roots to Dapu County in Guangdong Province, China. The pioneer Zhang Dajing was the first Dapu Hakka trader to come to Taiwan. Through a method called “land for water”*, he negotiated with the indigenous peoples for water rights in exchange for land use, thus securing the right to cultivate land in northwest Taichung. He then invited fellow Dapu Hakka to join in the settlement effort, laying the foundation for Taichung’s future prosperity and establishing Taiwan’s only Dapu Hakka settlement area.

However, starting from the Japanese colonial period, Taichung’s rapid industrial and commercial growth brought a large influx of migrants, gradually transforming the lifestyle of the Dapu Hakka. Today, it is not easy to recognize that northwest Taichung was once a Hakka stronghold. In fact, the Dapu Hakka dialect is now spoken only in more remote areas like Shigang, Dongshi, and Xinshe.

*This is considered a historical example of peaceful cooperation between indigenous peoples and Han settlers. Zhang Dajing exchanged water resources with the Plains Indigenous groups (or the Pingpu people) for land rights, resulting in a win-win outcome—turning wasteland into fertile fields and leading to abundant rice harvests.

Heavenly Father, all beauty in music and art comes from You. Everything we create is but a reshaping of what You have already made. Only You create from nothing—bringing forth the universe from chaos, forming humanity from dust, and breathing into us the gift of life. We pray that the Dapu Hakka people may come to know You as the supreme Creator, greater than every artist. May You delight in their music, just as You delighted in David’s psalms of praise. We ask that their musical gifts not only preserve their culture but also become instruments of worship to You. May the Dapu Hakka dialect be a beautiful tongue that proclaims Your grace and finds its fullest meaning in worship. Lead the Dapu Hakka people to respond to Your calling, living out the cultural mandate You have given humanity—not only in music but also as faithful stewards in every area of life. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Standard Hakka

Sixian Hakka People



Photo by Jasmin Örtel on Flickr

The Sixian (Four Counties) Hakka dialect is the most widely used Hakka accent in Taiwan's public media, such as MRT announcements and Hakka television. Its speakers are spread across a broad region: starting from Zhongli, Pingzhen, and Longtan in Taoyuan, skipping over Hsinchu County, and covering nearly all of Miaoli County, before extending further south into the Liudui area.

The dialect originates from four counties in Guangdong, China: Jiaoling, Pingyuan, Xingning, and Wuhua. These counties were later reorganized as Jiaying Prefecture and eventually became Meixian (Mei County) in the early Republican era. For this reason, Sixian Hakka are also often referred to as Meixian Hakka.

Because farmland in their homeland was limited, the Sixian Hakka were forced to migrate outward. Migration to Taiwan began in 1681 (the 20th year of Emperor Kangxi's reign) and peaked during the Yongzheng and Qianlong eras. A major factor was the Zhu Yigui incident in 1721*. After Hakka settlers helped suppress the rebellion, the Qing government loosened restrictions on migration from Guangdong. Today, the Sixian Hakka form the largest Hakka population in Taiwan.

Although all are part of the Sixian dialect, the vocabulary used in the Liudui region differs significantly from that of northern Taiwan. For instance, "tangyuan" (glutinous rice balls) are called "xied` ien` e`" in the north, but "ian` ban` e`" in Liudui. "Thank you" is expressed as "an` zii` se" in the north, but as "do` qia", "gam` qia" in Liudui. Furthermore, within Liudui, the Sixian dialect can be subdivided into three sub-dialects, represented by Meinong, Neipu, and Jiadong.

*In 1721, a rebellion broke out when Zhangzhou farmer Zhu Yigui launched an uprising under the slogan "Overthrow the Qing, restore the Ming." It was suppressed the same year by the Qing government.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for inspiring the Hakka people of Taiwan to launch the "Return Our Mother Tongue Movement," and for moving the government to respond by establishing policies, founding a Hakka television station, and creating Hakka research institutes to preserve the language and sustain Taiwan's linguistic diversity. May this commitment to diversity also take root in the church. We pray that You prepare the Taiwanese church to pursue justice and equality, embracing ethnic and cultural diversity without treating any culture as superior. Grant that the church may be a space where people of every ethnicity, nationality, and culture are welcomed, bearing witness to the love of Jesus Christ. This love gives us deep security and calls us into a greater unity. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Language Is Like a Person

Hailu Hakka People



Photo by Jason on Wikimedia Commons

Miaoli Old Street

The Hailu Hakka dialect is the second most widely spoken Hakka language variety in Taiwan. The name “Hailu” comes from the Hakka people whose ancestral homes were in Haifeng and Lufeng counties of Huizhou Country in Guangdong, China. Today, they are primarily concentrated in Hsinchu County, northern Miaoli, southern Taoyuan near Hsinchu, and the Hualien-Taitung region.

Hailu Hakka differs noticeably from Sixian Hakka in tone patterns: “When you rise, I fall; when you fall, I rise.” In other words, the tonal directions are often reversed. Sixian Hakka has six tones, while Hailu Hakka has seven. This creates distinct pronunciations for the same word. For example, the words for “pants” and “protect” are homophones in Sixian Hakka (both pronounced fu), but in Hailu Hakka they differ in tone (fu+ vs. fu˘).

Interestingly, language does not develop in isolation, just as people do not live apart from relationships. In the course of its growth, language inevitably comes into contact with others—exchanging, blending, and leaving traces of mutual influence. The depth of such contact is often reflected in borrowed, mixed, or fused vocabulary. Because Sixian and Hailu Hakka communities have long lived side by side—especially in northern Taiwan—their speech patterns naturally influenced one another. Over time, this gave rise to a blended new accent known as the Si-Hai dialect, which incorporates features of both.

Heavenly Father, we lift up the missionaries serving in Hakka villages. Grant them hearts that are attentive and sensitive, so they move beyond surface-level language study to grasp how Hakka speech reflects patterns of relationship and cultural blending. Give them wisdom to adapt their mission strategies to the local context and to the changing times. Lord, bless them with patience and discernment as they learn both the Sixian and Hailu dialects, and also as they seek to understand the emerging Si-Hai speech. May their language learning not stop at communication alone, but become a pathway into the inner world of the Hakka people, so that the seed of the gospel might take root deeply and flourish in Hakka soil. We pray this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Can Christians Honor Their Ancestors?

The Hakka “Three Offerings”



When Christianity first came from the West into Chinese society, it brought not only the Word of God but also Western interpretations of the Bible and patterns of church life shaped by Western culture. Yet, ancestor veneration is a deeply rooted tradition in Hakka culture and in wider Chinese society. When Western frameworks are held as the “standard” and Christians are taught to abandon ancestral rites altogether, it can feel like a betrayal of one’s ancestors and may even be seen by family members as an act of “unfilial piety.” If we fail to understand the deep cultural meaning of local practices, and instead simply apply Western interpretations of faith, Christianity can easily feel detached from people’s daily lives and unintentionally dismiss the precious value of local traditions.

From a Christian worldview, the dead are not regarded as spirits or gods. However, this does not mean that remembering and honoring one’s ancestors must be rejected. The Hakka church developed the indigenized practice known as the Hakka “Three Offerings” (see below) as an alternative to traditional ancestral worship. Instead of sacrifices, this rite emphasizes remembrance and gratitude, giving Christians a culturally appropriate way to express filial piety for the deceased. In addition, tools like the “Ancestor Memorial Register” and the “Generational Heritage Register” serve as Christian versions of Hakka genealogies. They preserve the Hakka spirit of honoring ancestors while replacing traditional spirit tablets, becoming another successful example of contextualization.

The Hakka “Three Offerings” Rite

This rite combines Chinese ancestral traditions with the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and has three parts:



The Water Offering

Symbolizing gratitude to the source of life, with prayer to God the Father.



The Flower Offering

Symbolizing the fragrant legacy of one’s ancestors, with prayer to God the Son.



The Candle Offering

Symbolizing the passing on of light and honor, with prayer to God the Holy Spirit.

Heavenly Father, in the past, the church believed that “filial piety in life” was enough, and that Western rituals could replace Chinese customs. Yet the Hakka people, shaped by their tradition of honoring ancestors, still struggle deeply with this in their faith. This struggle is very real. In the early church, Greek believers also faced pressure from Jewish customs, but You guided Paul and the Jewish Christian leaders to debate (Acts 15), and through visions You renewed Peter’s understanding of the Gentiles (Acts 10). Your will is that the Christian faith may be fully expressed in every time, language, and culture, showing forth Your love. The genealogies throughout Scripture testify to Your grace and blessing across generations. We thank You, Lord, for guiding the Hakka church to develop such creative contextualized practices. This not only refreshes our understanding of the gospel but also helps the Hakka people overcome their struggles with ancestral traditions. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

The Hakka Movement within the Church

The Hakka Bible



Please change the phrasing so it reads better for English readers. The last sentence also feels confusing as I'm not sure what "mother tongues" refers to.

The translation of the Hakka Bible in Taiwan began in 1960, but the work stalled soon after the Gospel of John was published. One reason was a change in translation policies by the United Bible Societies, which prevented the Bible Society in Taiwan from publishing additional books. The larger obstacle, however, was political. At the time, Taiwan was under martial law. The Nationalist government enforced a Mandarin-only policy, suppressing the use of other languages and banning Bibles in local tongues such as Hakka and Taiwanese Hokkien.

In 1987, martial law was lifted, and Taiwan's authoritarian system gave way to a wave of social movements. Citizens flooded the streets to protest past oppression and injustice. At the forefront stood Hakka intellectuals, who launched the "Return Our Mother Tongue Movement," urging the government to restore the use of Hakka. This awakening of Hakka identity also shaped the lives of Hakka Christians within the church. The Bible Society in Taiwan reestablished the Hakka Bible Translation Committee and resumed the work of translation. For decades, these resilient Hakka Christians labored quietly and faithfully. At last, in 2012, their perseverance bore fruit in the publication of the Hakka Bible: Today's Taiwan Hakka Version.

This translation, based primarily on the Sixian dialect widely spoken in Taiwan, presents Scripture using Hakka Chinese characters alongside Romanized phonetic transcription.

The Hakka Bible is both a precious gift and a powerful tool: a gift that allows the Hakka people to hear God's Word in the language of their hearts, and a tool that preserves and passes on their cultural and linguistic heritage. For many young Hakka, it has become not only an entry point into the faith, but also a starting place and teaching resource for learning their ancestral tongue.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for calling so many devoted Hakka Christians to dedicate themselves to the ministry of Bible translation. Lord, we pray that You would continue to greatly use the Hakka Bible: Today's Taiwan Hakka Version so that more Hakka people may encounter Your Word in the language closest to their hearts. May Your Word refresh them like gentle rain, shaping their minds, renewing their values, and saturating their lives in the fullness of Your truth. We also ask, Lord, that this Bible would serve as a bridge for the gospel. When nonbelievers encounter it while learning Hakka, may the Holy Spirit open their hearts, so that in the process of studying the language they may also encounter You, the Lord of life. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

A Treasure Trove of Hakka Mission Resources

Hakka Mission in Taiwan



The story of Hakka mission in Taiwan begins with the Presbyterian Church of England. In 1865, Dr. James Laidlaw Maxwell, sent by the Presbyterian Church of England as both missionary and physician, landed in Kaohsiung. Two years later, Rev. Hugh Ritchie and his wife came to Taiwan to assist him. While the early mission work in Taiwan focused mainly on the Minnan-speaking population, Rev. Ritchie noticed the distinct culture of the Hakka and felt a burden to share the gospel with them. To prepare, he began studying the Hakka language. In 1875, Rev. Ritchie established the first Hakka church, becoming the pioneer of Hakka mission in Taiwan.

Today, Taiwan is blessed with abundant resources for Hakka mission—such as the Christian Hakka Seminary, the Christian Hakka Evangelical Association, and the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan's Hakka Presbytery—as well as the Hakka Chong-Zhen Churches of Taiwan, a denomination primarily composed of Hakka believers. SEND International has long partnered with the Christian Hakka Seminary and the Christian Hakka Evangelical Association, while also helping Hakka churches develop new ministries. Many Hakka Christians have also offered their gifts by composing hymns in the style of traditional Hakka mountain songs, which have become powerful tools for evangelism in the church.

The 2021 National Hakka Population and Language Survey reports that Taiwan has 4.669 million Hakka people, one-fifth of the total population and the island's second largest ethnic group. Yet, despite their size, Hakka communities are often regarded as “hard soil for the gospel.” Barely 0.5% profess faith in Christ—meaning that, on average, not even one out of every hundred Hakka is a believer.

Heavenly Father, from the day Dr. Maxwell first set foot in Kaohsiung in 1865 to the burden You placed on Rev. Ritchie and his wife for the Hakka, we see that the Hakka have always been a people You love and long to redeem. We lift up every Hakka mission organization, church, and sending agency in Taiwan. Strengthen the hands of Your servants, deepen their faith, and guard them from discouragement; may they be fully satisfied in Your love. Holy Spirit, pour out Your grace upon this people so often described as “hard soil.” Soften their hearts, that the seed of the gospel may take root and flourish. Lord, raise up more churches to engage in Hakka mission, wisely drawing on Taiwan's resources and networks to gather the harvest and bring Hakka people to Christ. We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Taiwan

A Small Light, Shining Bright

Hakka mission in Taiwan is like a mustard seed: though it began small, it has grown through faith and perseverance, now shining brightly on the global map of missions.



Hakka Sacred Music Ensemble

Many Hakka love to sing, and Christians are no exception. Traditional Hakka mountain songs tell of the hardships of migration, the struggles of daily life, or are sung as love duets between men and women. For Christians, singing became a way to understand the gospel. Hymns and sacred music set to Hakka melodies have also become powerful tools for evangelism in the church.

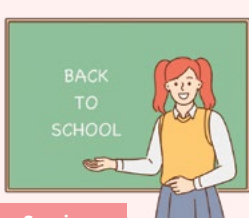


Hakka Gospel Song Writing

Over the past two decades, many organizations have invested deeply in Hakka-language ministry. In addition to Bible translation, another important way of helping Hakka Christians embrace the gospel while preserving their language has been through encouraging and publishing gospel music written in Hakka.

Huang Tsuei-Fang ▶

"Holding Your Hand"



Christian Hakka Seminary

In 1999, Hakka pastors reached a consensus that Hakka mission work needed its own seminary to train pastors and missionaries. The following year, the Hakka Mission School was officially established, and in 2002 it was renamed the Christian Hakka Seminary. Seven years later, the board purchased land in Longtan, Taoyuan, and launched a fundraising campaign. In 2016, the seminary building was officially completed.

"And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14)



Hakka Chong-Zhen Churches of Taiwan

Inspired by the story of Esther, Pastor Peng De-Lang, a Hakka minister from the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, felt called to take up the responsibility of bringing the gospel to his own people. He went on to establish the Hakka Chong-Zhen Churches of Taiwan, a denomination rooted in the Hakka community. Today it has grown to 14 congregations, with 70% of its pastors fluent in Hakka and more than half of its churches composed of congregations where Hakka believers make up over 70%.



Christian Hakka Evangelical Association

The Christian Hakka Evangelical Association (CHEA) is dedicated to publishing Hakka hymnals, promoting the Hakka Bible, linking Hakka churches in Taiwan with Hakka Christian organizations worldwide, and supporting under-resourced Hakka communities across the globe. In recent years, CHEA has also focused on raising up the younger Hakka generation by organizing youth evangelistic teams, children's Hakka music ensembles, and short-term mission trips led by young people to serve in Hakka villages.

Back to the Bible

The Hakka Worldview



Photo by diGital Sennin on Unsplash

Worldview is deeply rooted in every culture. It encompasses values, beliefs, and faith, serving as the foundation that shapes a community's way of life, patterns of thought, and codes of behavior. Anthropologists commonly categorize worldviews into three types: guilt–innocence, fear–power, and shame–honor. Broadly speaking, Western culture is largely built on a guilt–innocence framework, while Hakka culture intertwines both shame–honor and fear–power dynamics.

Shaped by Confucian thought, Hakka culture places a strong emphasis on “face” and carries a deep collective consciousness in which the honor or shame of the group is inseparable from the individual. Hakka people take pride in outstanding figures from their ethnic group, such as Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore, Deng Xiaoping of China, and Lee Teng-hui of Taiwan. This mindset of shared honor reflects the very essence of “face” culture. At the same time, fear also plays a role in shaping practice, as Hakka communities traditionally offer sacrifices to wandering spirits—“good brothers”—in hopes of pacifying them and avoiding misfortune.

By contrast, much of Western theology, with its emphasis on the “confession of sin,” addresses guilt and innocence but often neglects other biblical themes such as honor and shame, collective identity, relationships, the spiritual realm, and filial piety. For this reason, when sharing Jesus with Hakka people, we must take worldview differences seriously, put on new cultural lenses, and retell the gospel in a way that speaks directly into these contexts.

It is also important to remember that no culture is defined by a single worldview. The mix of worldviews varies widely, and the cultures of Hakka communities around the world are especially diverse and complex. In every setting, we must return to Scripture, seeking the timeless truth of the gospel and how it uniquely addresses the deepest needs of each culture.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for how You have worked through Western theologians to deepen our understanding of who You are. At the same time, we recognize that Western theology has often given less attention to biblical themes such as honor and shame, collective identity, relationships, and filial piety—concepts central to the Chinese worldview and deeply rooted in Hakka culture. Lord, we ask that You reveal how Jesus meets the deepest needs of the Hakka: not only the forgiveness of sins, but also honor in place of shame, and peace in place of fear. Guide missionaries to grasp the heart of Hakka culture and to reread Scripture with fresh eyes, so they may present the gospel in contextually meaningful ways and carry out mission work with greater fruitfulness. We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

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📍 P. O. Box 3356
Los Altos, CA 94024-0356 U.S.A.
☎ +1 (650) 968-1866
☎ +60 18-315 7707
✉ info@missionpathway.org
🌐 www.cross-roads.org/eng



Crossroads
Publications

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Cheif Editor

Yein Yein

Editor

Enoch Lee, Isa Hsu, Joan Chang

Translator

Cindy Wu

Proofreader

Keith Carey

Administrative Coordinator

Priscilla Pua, Novia Lu, Sukin, Maritza

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Crossroads Publications

📍 P. O. Box 3356

Los Altos, CA 94024-0356 U.S.A.

☎ +1 (650) 968-1866

✉ info@missionpathway.org

🌐 missionpathway.org

CANADA

CCCOWE Canada

☎ +1 (437) 216-6085 (Ps. Enoch Lee)

✉ missionpathway.ca@gmail.com

TAIWAN

UMOT

☎ (02) 2321-2915

✉ service@umot.org.tw

HONG KONG

HKSTM

☎ +852 52822747

✉ info@hkstm.org.hk

SINGAPORE

CNEC

☎ +65 6280 0312

✉ cnec@cnecintl.org