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The Hakka In Migration History*

Wang Gungwu

It gave me great pleasure to hear that there was going to be this first international conference on Hakka Studies. There have been many efforts to study the Hakka people, but there had not been an opportunity before to pull together all the expertise in China and around the world to give the subject the kind of push and impetus which it deserves. The Chingese University of Hong Kong, with support from the C. N. R. S. in France, should be congratulated for organising this International Conference, bringing together scholars who have made the study of the Hakka people their specialisation.

I am not a specialist on the Hakka myself. What I know depends very much on the available published literature. I have consulted the *Guangxu Jiayingzhou zhi* (Local Gazetteer on the Prefecture of Jiaying) of 1898 by Wen Zhonghe but, like everybody else, I have been strongly influenced by Professor Lo Hsiang—lin (Luo Xianglin) and his pioneer and authoritatative works on Hakka history. I have also drawn much from the writings by many people in

this room. Thus I do not have anything new to offer in terms of research but would like to take this opportunity to make some comparative comments on the distribution of the Hakka people. I have long been struck by the global spread of the Hakka overseas and believe there are some universal ideas stemming from the Hakka experience in history which should be very useful in other fields of studies. It is from that point of view that I shall be approaching the subject of the Hakka in migration history. Migration history is one of my special interests. Thus ,I shall focus on some questions concerning patterns of migration, particularly for the Chinese people, as well as on aspects of migration history to which I think the Hakka have contributed.

The Hakka outside China

Let me begin by looking at the subject from the outside. I was involved, through the Australian Academy of Humanities, with the publication of the *Linguistic Atlas of China*, a most interesting and worthwhile project. <1> With the help of excellent scholars and linguists from the People's Republic of China, we were able to bring together the latest data of numerous surveys made by professional linguists in China, locating the scattered groups of Hakka people all over China. That *Linguistic Atlas* seemed to me to be a first step in understanding, that is, to have an accurate picture of the distribution of the Hakka within China itself. I believe it is the most reliable linguistic survey of China to

date, and the Hakka featured prominently in the survey. Prof. Li Rong and his team of linguists in Beijing and, in fact, all over China, many of whom had done many years of field work locating the Hakka people scattered around the country, provided the editors of the *Atlas* with invaluable data.

The *Atlas* also provided two maps on the distribution of the Hakka around the world. <2> These were more difficult to produce. But again, with the help of many fellow scholars around the world, there is now a broad picture of the distribution of the Hakka. This is a mere beginning, a preliminary statement of what the distribution is like. It is preliminary because the Hakka are migrant people, on the move a lot of the time, so that no study can really be up—to—date. Throughout history, they have shown themselves ready to move on to the next stop. The editors realised that to try and compile even a linguistic atlas of the distribution of the Hakka, except for the heartland of the Hakka in north—eastern Guangdong and western Fujian, they had to be comtinually alert as to where the Hakka have gone. Mobility is one of the characteristics of the Hakka people, which makes them so valuable for our understanding of migration history. And, of course, the linguistic distribution of the Hakka outside China also shows their chosen migration routes.

Where the Hakka outside of China are concerned, there

are not many places where they form the dominant Chinese group. Generally, the Hakka have been latecomers and are not the majority where there are large concentrations of Chinese people. Exceptions are places like Mauritius, where, among the Chinese population, they are the majority, and Tahiti, where again the Hakka are the clear majority. In certain localized areas in different countries, the Hakka also form the majority among relatively small Chinese populations. That is the case in several parts of the West Indies. There are also some even smaller communities where the Hakka form the majority, for example, in Samoa, Seychelles and parts of South Africa. On the whole, however, they tend to be a minority among Chinese minorities.

Of course, the picture has changed during the last hundred years. There were places where the Hakka had been dominant and where they are now less so. The most famous example is the Lanfang *kongsi* in West Kalimantan (Bomeo). <3> This was a historically significant community, and many people have drawn lessons from the Hakka experience in the gold fields there to try to understand the nature of Chinese migration patterns. The picture, however, is less clear now. There are also places like the islands of Bangka and Billiton in Indonesia where the Hakka mining population used to be dominant. They still probably constitute the majority of the Hakka mining population used to be dominant. They still probably constitute the majority of the

Chinese population in Billiton, but to what extent the territory can actually sustain a distinctly Hakka community is less certain. I have not visited either of these two islands, but a recent book on the subject by Professor Mary Somers Heidhues of the University of Gottingen called *Bangka Tin and Mentok Pepper*, is a fascinating study of how the Hakka worked in the tin mines and developed the economies of Bangka and Billiton. <4> Over time, under very stressful changing conditions in Indonesia, the nature of the Hakka communities has changed rapidly. In the nineteenth century, we could still speak of Hakka communities in Bangka, Billiton and West Kalimantan. Today, we may have to talk of Chinese communities that are, perhaps, still identifiable Hakka in many ways. This kind of change is one of the themes now common among Chinese communities outside China.

One feature which should be noted from the very beginning is that the Hakka were the people most willing, among all the Chingese migrant groups, to go into the rural areas largely because most of them had mining and hillside farming and gathering backgrounds and were accustomed to working in remote areas throughout their own history in China. The Hakka did not regard ports, towns and cities as their natural habitats. They have always been more adventurous and were willing to be pioneers in opening up territories and going into areas which few other Chinese ventured

into. That characteristic remained true almost everywhere they went. Even when they went to work as artisans and labourers and not as miners, they would still be willing to go outside the major concentrations of Chinese population. This is one of the reasons why they have remained minorities. They tended to scatter, to go into smaller and remote areas and not drift naturally into towns and cities as most of the Cantonese, Hokkien and even some of the Teochiu (Chaozhou) people did. This characteristic remains strong. It is the kind of pioneering enterprise that reinforces solidarity and demands that they remain frugal and hard — working. This is the quality which made them particularly successful in tin mining, which they dominated in a place like the Kinat Valley in West Malaysia.

I might also briefly mention a few other places where the Hakka have been significant minorities. One of them is western Sarawak because some of the Hakka people from West Kalimantan crossed the border to mine gold in Bau; others from the Bomeo coasts travelled further to West Malaysia for tin. Another example is the little Hakka enclave in the southern part of Kelantan (in West Malaysia) called Pulai. <5> These Hakka are a very isolated group. How they got there, why they went, how long they have stayed and how they continue to prosper and develop their own community makes one of those fascinating stories that distinguish the Hakka experience from those of other Chi-

nese groups. Other places in which the Hakka are a sizable and important minority include parts of Java, parts of Acheh and parts of East Sumatra. It is also well—known that the Hakka are distributed throughout Malaysia and Singapore. They are a large minority in Singapore and are significant minorities in most states on the Malay Peninsula. The Hakka are particularly strong in the Kinta Valley centred at Ipoh, in the Kelang Valley centred at Kuala Lumpur, and in the heart of Negri Sembilan within reach of Seremban.

As far as Southeast Asia is concerned, the distribution of the Hakka in itself is interesting. I have a hypothesis about this. Since the Hakka sojourners were willing to go to rural and more remote areas, they tend to be rather far apart from communities that are city or town oriented. Areas in which the Hakka have been significant minorities are very often places where the Hokkien and Teochiu people are the clear majorities. In such areas, the three groups seem to have lived in some symblotic relationship. This is an interesting contrast to areas where the Hakka and the Cantonese are in contiguous relationship. There are far fewer examples of the latter. It seems that wherever the Cantonese are dominant, for example, North America, you find relatively few Hakka. But as there are only a small number of places in Southeast Asia where the Cantonese are really dominant, it is hard to prove this, so the point made here remains only a

hypothesis.

The exception is Mauritius, which I find notable. <6> The Cantonese formed the dominant group in Mauritius through the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. At the beginning of this century, the Hakka began to move to Mauritius in larger numbers. The relationship was relatively peaceful, but it was a strange relationship. Many people there remembered the Hakka — Punti (Cantonese) conflicts in central—eastern Guangdong in the nineteenth centruy. Both sides treated each other with caution. Over time there seemed to have been a transformation of the local Chinese society. Gradually the Hakka latecomers became dominant among the Chinese and the Cantonese population declined in size. Economically, the position moved from Cantonese leadership of the community in Mauritius to a Hakka dominance.

As a result, the Cantonese tended to move away to Réunion and Madagascar, where a clear Cantonese majority emerged. When I visited Mauritius and Réunion in the 1970s and talked to the people there, I was struck by one comment that several people made. The Cantonese felt, as they put it, somewhat 'threatened' by the Hakka. The Cantonese in Réunion, for example, told me that the example of Mauritius showed that when the Cantonese and the Hakka lived close together, the Cantonese always lost out to the latter. The Cantonese were, therefore, very careful about

admitting Hakka into R—eunion. They claim to have passed the message on to Madagascar, where the Cantonese, through their official contacts with the French colonial government, made sure that no Hakka migrants were allowed to land in Madagascar. This is anecdotal material reflecting perceptions and attitudes. I have not been able to check the records and am not offering it as scientific evidence. <7> But it raises the interesting question that there may be a contrast, probably even on mainland China, between the way the Hakka lived with the Cantonese, Where conflicts arose, and the way they lived with the Hokkien and the Teochiu people where there were no recent examples of tensions. Apparently, in the latter case, the different sub—ethnic groups have come to a *rapprochement* in the region and people lived side by side and intermingled much more readily and easily. This is, of course, no more than a hypothesis suggested on the bases of my experience with some Hakka communities outside China.

As for migration patterns, I refer to my essay distinguishing between the early *huashang* (Chinese merchants) phase and the later *huagong* (Chinese labor) phase. <8> On the whole the Hakka were not natural merchants and hence were slow to venture forth to Southeast Asia. As merchants, they could not compare with the Hokkien, for example, who were much more skilled in commercial activities. In certain large areas of technical and artisan skills,

the Cantonese were better trained and more experienced and, therefore, more dominant in the relevant trades. Where mining in remote terrains were concerned and where the migrants need to be adventurous and act as pioneers entering undeveloped areas, the Hakka had an edge over everybody else.

The chain migration effect, that is, the systematic migration to areas where early members of the clan or village or speech group had already established themselves, is also very obvious among the Hakka. Examples can be found everywhere. The Hakka in Tahiti and Saban (North Bomeo) had come mainly from Xinan or Baoan (north of Hong Kong) county in Huizhou prefecture; in the Kinta Valley, they were mainly from Jiayingzhou prefecture or Meixian county; and in the Kuala Lumpur area also mainly from Huizhou. Many Fujian Hakka, a very special group, went to Burma, other Hakka went to Thailand. In short, the chain migration effect is very strong.

What I find particularly interesting and very relevant to our study of Chinese migrations today is what the Hakka have always been interested in and have much experience of —a phenomenon I call 're—migration'. In other words, the Hakka do not migrate to one place only and settle down. Terms like *keju*, *qiaoju* (temporarily residing, or sojourning), have a special resonance for them since the word *Hak* in the name Hakka is the Cantonese pronuncia-

tion of *ke*. When we say *huaqiao*, the *qiao* itself, like *ke*, implies temporary sojourning in a place. The Hakka, in this way, are a classic example of sojourning. <9> They do not, on the whole, move to one place in order to put their roots down. All their movements are trial movements, and they tend to be what I call 'experimental migrants'. They are always ready to re—migrate if the conditions are not suitable and move on to the next place in search of something more interesting, encouraging and hopeful. Their readiness to move is, I think, characteristic of the Hakka migration pattern. This is also somewhat different from the other groups of Chinese. Re—migration among the Hakka had begun early within China itself and is certainly noteworthy abroad.

The next point to make is that though the Hakka have a great sense of identity outside China, they are more concerned to be identified as Chinese rather than as a distinct Hakka community. This is less true of other dominant groups. The Hokkien in Penang and Singapore, for example, had a more clear—cut idea that they lived in a Hokkien dominated territory, both linguistically and culturally. In terms of social organisation, they were better organised and were much more confident of their position as a dominant group. Similarly, so were the Teochiu in the Bangkok region, the Hokkien in the Philippines and the Cantonese in California. The Hakka, as a minority among minorities,

had a somewhat different approach. In fact, amidst other Chinese communities, the Hakka, probably with the exception of those in Mauritius where their relationship with the Cantonese was somewhat special, tended to emphasise the commonality of their Chineseness in relation to non—Chinese peoples among whom they lived.

The Hakka within China

I have said something about the global distribution of the Hakka people. Now let me move on to the migration history of the Hakka within China. The comparison between the two is very enlightening. Within China, it is quite cleat that the Hakka people are the classic migrant people. Again, if you look at the *Linguistic Atlas of China*, you will find six maps which tell us where the Hakka now are. One of CVthem deals exclusively with the distribution of the Hakka. In the others, you will find the linguistic distribution in the provinces of Guangdong, Fujian, Jiangxi, Hunan, Sichuan and Guangxi. Of course, these linguistic maps do not necessarily display all the locations of Hakka communities. These are merely the places where the Hakka language is spoken and is still recognisable.

Just before I came to Hong Kong, I had long discussions with Professor Leong Sow Theng, who was doing research on Hakka history. He was from Ipoh in West Malaysia and was Professor of Asian Studies at Murdoch University in Perth. Unfortunately, he died a few years ago

before he could complete his work, which was a major study on the ethnicity of the Hakka. His work was very new and fresh. He had conducted field work, not only in his ancestral home-town, Meixian, but also in parts of north—eastern Guangdong, western Fujian, even the border areas between Jiangxi and Hunan. He visited many communities of Hakka oringin, not only ancient Hakka settlements, but also relatively new ones in which fresh Hakka migrants had come to settle among earlier communities. For example, people had migrated from north—eastern Guangdong, many from the Meixian area, into provinces like Jiangxi, Hunan and Sichuan within the last two hundred years. Their Meixian Hakka speech was still recognisable, and they were still conscious of their Hakka origins. What he thought most interesting was that the new Hakka merged quite well with the earlier layers of Hakka people. This kind of layering of Hakka people was a very interesting phenomenon.

Although Professor Leong did not finish his work, what he did manage to finish before he died will soon be published and should be available shortly. The book is entitled *Migration and Ethnicity in Chinese History: Hakkas, Pengmin and their Neighbours.* The word Pengmin (shed people) is particularly interesting. <10> It is a kind of sojourning, or 'experimental migration', during which the people literally lived in sheds as temporary accomodation. It is a way of migrating along the mountain ranges in search of

land, of cash — crop land, of mines, timber areas and forests, etc. The Hakka had practised these activities over a long time together with other minority peoples in the mountain ranges of southern China. Professor Leong brought all these materials together to make an interesting story. The book will be published by Stanford University Press with an introduction by Professor G. William Skinner and is edited by a close colleague at Murdoch University in Perth, Dr. Tinothy Wright. It will be a serious and very important contribution to Hakka studies.

Professor Leong's work supplements what is found in the *Linguistic Atlas* and some interesting features deserve comment here. The heartland of the Hakka is now mainly in the Jiayingzhou area in north — eastern Guangdong. The connections and links with other Hakka areas today may not be significant and I do not know if the Hakka minorities in Guangxi, in Bobai, or down by the Vietnam border, still have strong feelings about their origins in Jiayingzhou, or the intermediate areas in central Guangdong. The story, of course, began with their original ancestors who went south in waves from North China, notably from southern Henan, Hubei and Anhui provinces, over a period of several centuries. The time it took for the Hakka to settle in western Fujian and then formulate an enhanced sense of identity with north—eastern Guangdong is a most interesting story.

From our records, we know that Jiayingzhou did not