

*Local Images in National and Global Contexts:  
The Shifting Significances of Hakka Folk Songs*

Hui-Yun Yang

Minghsin University of Science and Technology, Taiwan

0338

The Asian Conference on Cultural Studies 2013

Official Conference Proceedings 2013



iafor

iafor  
The International Academic Forum  
[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## **Introduction**

Modernism brings with it many changes in people's lives and is often a reason for disenchantment with the traditional ways. In Taiwan, many traditions have been maintained, however, and one of these is the singing of mountain songs by the Hakka minority group who live in north-central areas of the island. The Hsinchu area in Taiwan has its distinctive characteristics for its location, cultural diversity, and technology-based science park. In other words the modern technology has brought connections of the area with the rest of the world through the trade of computer chips and other advancements. Generally, the face the area gives the global markets for computer technology has very little to do with its local traditions; it is however the global which gives a rationale to support the local traditions so that important signs of the distinct heritage and identity can be preserved. Since the language of the songs is in dialect, there is also little danger of them just becoming a commodity of exchange on the global market, as with many of the things of material culture.

## **The National Context**

The national context for Hakka images makes them representative of the Hakka minority in Taiwan. In an effort to preserve the local heritages, leisure farms, cultural centers of the Hakka and of the indigenous tribes located in the mountain areas and forestry resources have been gradually developed as travel sites for Taiwan, countering the high-tech image of the region. Recently, the local government held the 2013 Lantern Festival of Taiwan and people from all around the island congregated during the period of the Lantern Festival, which was prolonged to accommodate the crowds of people. While most visitors were nationals from Taiwan, visitors from Mainland China and foreign tourists, who happened to be there during that time, also added this festival to their itineraries. Hakka food vendors, artists, and lantern designers all contributed to the festival. Traditional images were found in the cultural displays provided by participating organizations. The festival symbolized the successful union of people from different Taiwanese cultural backgrounds with the Hakka people in Taiwan.

Underlying this new national emphasis on local culture are policies that come from changes in the official attitude toward the minority. More people are studying variations of the Hakka language for the movement of teaching and learning languages in elementary schools. Most parents of school children are happy to comply with the new educational policy of languages. Thus, the involvement in local cultural activities is especially meaningful for school children.

It is within this double focus of the global and the local that Hakka mountain song performances are as important as a sign of the culture. Singing the songs, people entertain themselves with their singing group members. The songs are embodied with diverse subjects, such as ethics, working, family relationships, love, folk culture, and even politics. Thus, singing songs, people express their feelings of life and values of the world. They reflect the life styles of their ancestors and the changes of the modern generation. The written form of the language is utilized the Chinese writing system. The representations of the songs are the value of life of the Hakka people as the celebration of three mountain gods' birthday, drum festival, local food festivals, Tung flower festival and herbal tea festival.

According to history, the Hakka ancestors originally came from the central areas of Mainland China, and then moved to the coastal areas, and finally migrated to Taiwan because of wars or other factors. Most of the Hakka people have inhabited the mountainous areas for the influences of the majority group. Being one of the minorities, they have been able to acculturate themselves by speaking different languages, such as Mandarin Chinese, the Ming language, and Hakka language. In the past, they were farmers and had to earn a living by working hard on their farms. They had confronted hardships and learned patience and endurance. The cultural icons of the Hakka people include mountain songs, tung flowers, and Hakka delicacy dishes. People join in Hakka festivals by listening to mountain songs, eating Hakka food, and appreciating tung flowers.

Hakka women have become significant bearers of Hakka culture and their role is symbolic of the family. In spite of their importance to the family, the right of education among the old generations ranging from 65 to 80 or more had been deprived. During the Japanese occupation, most of these generations had gone through hardship owing to the colonization. Their families suffered from poverty, so their parents couldn't afford for them to study in public or private schools and priority was given to male sons. The illiteracy rate of these generations is quite high. In modern Taiwan, their role would be minimal in the civil order because of this inequality.

In order to counteract the deprivation of this generation of women, in recent years, under Republican governments, literacy programs are encouraged and sometimes subsidized by the government. New communities have been born in Hakka areas: these are signs of new creativity and change. Because people are rather migratory while the younger generation searches for jobs, the older generation who must settle down in new areas have played significant roles in enriching the local ethnicity. Many of the groups organized in the communities include reading and writing activities. Elementary and junior high school reading materials such as short reading texts and Tang and Sung Dynasty poetry are used for practicing the concepts of strokes and meanings of Chinese. Preparing the food sacrifices for family worship is an important part of their yearly round of activities. They have practiced Hakka culture together by worshipping their ancestors, earth gods, and Three Mountain Gods, the latter being a particular focus of the Hakka people. They have not only worked together for cultivating the Hakka spirit in their local communities but also joined in these literacy groups to develop their word banks by reading and writing Chinese characters. Community activities of singing Hakka mountain songs and literacy programs are offered.

Many centuries ago, the Hakka songs and Hakka religions had been brought from Mainland China by waves of ancestors. Performing Hakka mountain songs in public, Hakka women of the old generation have collectively become a signifier of Hakka culture. However, the concept of revivalism which is being practiced in the hope that the culture may continue is also to some extent a deception: even though such groups strive to maintain the arts and patterns of Hakka culture, continuity is still at risk because of the ongoing conflict with traditional ideas caused by economic shifts and concepts prevalent in the popular mainstream culture. Worshipping Three Mountain Kings (三山國王) and Yi-Ming Venerable Saint (義民爺), Hakka people have valued

themselves highly for being loyal and courageous. From an ideological point of view and an aesthetic view, such women as Yang-Chen represents a crossroads between the tradition and the revival of tradition, two different experiences of Hakka culture. The new purpose of singing Hakka songs arouses the hope of Hakka cultural revivalism and is ideological. It is not a realistic part of everyday life as in the past, but has become a pleasurable entertainment for a specific generation and indeed can preserve the arts of the mountain songs in an aesthetic framework. That is, in the aesthetic view, Hakka songs are now ostensibly categorized as an art which needs to be valued and preserved.

Hakka Mountain Songs are rich in reflecting the enduring spirit and the lifestyle of the Hakka groups. The numerous activities include expressing love between men and women, picking tea leaves, making a living, and describing the motifs of migration and settings of their living places. Singing the songs, Hakka women keep reminding their descendents of their ancestors' legends, stories, and life experiences. Through practicing the eight tunes, they constantly transform the Hakka spirit into new meanings which may be significant for their descendents to keep safe and strong in the modern world. Thus, they have played an important role in the studies of Hakkaology. Nowadays, more and more Hakka scholars are working with the Hakka studies on different aspects of the Hakka spirit and the cultural activities, such as Hakka Mountain Songs and festivals for celebrating gods' birthdays and Moon Festivals. By supporting such groups, the nationalist leaders find that they can enhance multiculturalist values and are able to gain their own benefits in doing so.

### **The Global Context**

One of the highlights of the Hsin Chu festival this year was the opening of the Pavilion that represented Taiwan at the World's Fair in Shanghai in 2012. This representation of the nationality of Taiwan According to Manfred B. Steger, globalization is what puts local cultures into intensified and accelerated contact with one another. He claims that globalization processes are not just about material things, but also take place upon a "subjective plane." Steger further claims that

The compression of the world into a single place increasingly makes global the frame of reference for human thought and action. Hence, globalization involves both the macro-structures of community and the micro-structures of personhood. It extends deep into the core of the self and its dispositions, facilitating the creation of new individual and collective identities nurtured by the intensifying relations between the individual and the globe. (15)

The claim for ethnic preservation and solidarity in the global context changes the whole "frame of reference" for the signs of traditional Hakka identity.

By analyzing the cultural images of the Hakka songs in various contexts, the problem of stereotypes of the ethnic group can be investigated. From the theory of diaspora, Hakka people migrated from the Mainland China, and literally they are guests of the Taiwan island. Their own self-images have great influences on their younger generations. They hope to maintain their own cultural identities by singing the mountain songs and work together as a community to promote the well being of the younger generations. Many believe it is worthy to communicate with other ethnic

groups of Taiwan to let them know more about the Hakka people in their midst.

### **How Modernism Influences the Meanings of Mountain Songs**

The Hakka people are not as isolated from the mainstream society as the indigenous tribal peoples are and have found their road to success in the national society and the global reach. But as they leave the traditional world, the ethnicity remains something to be held on to. It is such a traditional world that is represented in the Hakka Mountain Songs. It is within the different contexts of the national and the global that the song performances become important as a sign of the culture. Singing the songs, people entertain themselves with their singing group members. The songs are embodied with diverse subjects, such as ethics, working, family relationships, love, folk culture, and even politics. These images reflect the life styles of the ancestors and the changes of the modern generation. Although in the written form of the language the Chinese writing system is utilized, the meanings of the songs speak of the value of life of the Hakka people.

The struggle for cultural survival today includes the usage of Hakka in the family, more Hakka channels on TV, Hakka education at both the elementary and junior high school settings, Hakka mountain songs, and Hakka literature. Shan (1994) indicated the intercultural transformation of identity caused by bicultural influences and proposed the recycling processes of the psyche: construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction. In 1993, the government licensed more applicants. Most Hakka people have learned Min dialect by watching TV programs.

In Taiwan, the revivalism of Hakka mountain songs has activated the spirit of old Hakka women, too. They work together to fulfill their social responsibilities, such as supporting local activities, joining in some public festival celebrations or election campaigns by singing their favorite mountain songs. The personal experiences of these women make them enthusiastic about the cultural activities of the community such as travelling with the group for worship at temples around Taiwan. All of these activities would not have been possible for women before the contemporary period because of their activities in the household.

### **Conclusion**

As the foregoing has shown, work and gender relationships are a recurring theme in the mountain songs even though the real-life references for these relationships are now new ones. Contemporary concepts of the family and other ideas are at odds with the cultural signs in the songs. In the national context, where multiculturalism is encouraged, the Hakka may use the songs to represent and support their ethnic differences from other Taiwanese while at the same time keeping the community spirit alive. In the global context, the songs speak for the past in the present and provide a counter voice in the global reach of the local area's computer industry. Therefore it is suggested in this paper that, when the contextual references for the images become rather remote, the evocation of nostalgic feelings is increased and solidarity of the community is supported by a revised cultural imagination. The new aesthetic appreciation for the songs and community feeling, the paper suggests, paradoxically arises from the community's shared reflection on the distant, but shared history.



## References

- 史宗玲(2011)。機器翻譯即時通—台灣簽詩嘛口通。台北：書林出版有限公司。
- Baker, M. (1993). Corpus linguistics and translation studies: Implications and applications. In M. Baker, G. Francis & E. Tognini-Bonelli (eds.), *Text and technology: In honor of John Sinclair* (pp. 223-250). Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Laviosa, S. (2002). Corpus-based translation studies: Theory, findings, applications. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi.
- Steger, Manfred B.(2009). *Globalization*. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- Vanderauwera, R. (1985). Dutch novels translated into English: The transformation of a minority literature. Radopi: Amsterdam.
- Venuti, L. (1995) *The translator's invisibility: A history of translation*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Yang, Hui-Yun. (2010). Hakka women constructing selfhood in revivalist communities in Taiwan. 2010 Crossroads for Cultural Studies Conference. 17-21, 06. Department of Cultural Studies and Kwan Fong Cultural Research and Development Programme of Lingnan University, Hong Kong.

## Appendix I Translation Examples of the Hakka Mountain Songs

### Example A

客家山歌	兩儕樂意唔怕窮，唔怕討食背竹筒； 總愛兩人落力做，南蛇脫殼會變龍。 三月裡來係清明，公婆相好好名聲； 公婆相惜名聲好，無錢比人有較贏。 新作田塍雙面光，阿哥蒔田妹挑秧； 朝晨出門到暗轉，肩頸不痛腳毋軟。
英文翻譯	A happy couple is not afraid of being poor, and they're not afraid to carry loads of bamboo. Everything will be fine if the couple works hard, and snakes turns into dragons after shedding their skins. The tomb sweeping day falls in March, and <u>Grandpa and Grandma's (a couple)</u> harmonious relationship deserves a good reputation. They love each other to enjoy a good fame, and thereby win more than others. The new rice field is shiny after <u>A-go (husband)</u> plows the field, and <u>Mei (wife)</u> plants rice sprouts. They leave for work in the morning and return home until it gets dark, but they do not complain aching necks and weak feet.

### Example B

客家山歌	一下天晴一下陰，阿哥實在無良心； 真情真義你唔信，反把黃銅當真金。 一早來到雷公崁，青青山色挂天間； 西邊月光唔曾落，東片日頭又出山。 三步行來兩步企，一心一意來等你； 等到你來無話講，燈草織布枉心機。 七老八老唔知羞，歲數佬多花唔收； 白蟻上到背囊項，閻王來信壽難留。 七早八早就犁床，一夜無睡到天光； 傳宗接代正當事，愛對父母有商量。
英文翻譯	Just like the changes of the weather, my <u>A-go (lover)</u> has no conscience. Not believing my sincere feelings, you mistake <u>bronze (false love)</u> for <u>gold (true love)</u> . I go to Thunder Hill in the morning, and see the reflection of the green mountain in the sky. The moon is still up in the western sky as the sun rises from the mountain in the eastern sky. Walking in a hurry, I wait for you with all my heart. Welcoming you, I can hardly say any word; it is not worthwhile to weave with straw. You feel no shame for old age, and I cannot accept flowers for the sake of my age. The white ants climb up my back; Yánwáng (God of Death) sends notice, so there is no excuse to stay. You plow the field in the early morning, and I don't sleep well lying awake all night. Having the next generation is a serious issue, and I must discuss with my parents over this.

### Example C

客家山歌	一項豬肉煮清湯，二項鴨肉煮嫩薑； 三項鯉魚半煎煮，四項和妹久久長。 二月裡來榴花開，榴樹抽心葉下來； 榴樹抽心葉下出，爬床蹶蓆望哥來。 四想度子苦難當，屎尿拉到滿背囊； 拿到河邊來去洗，冷風河水雪加霜。 六姊床上睡沉沉，雙手打開妳門庭； 雙腳跪在妹身上，兩人來結千年情。 七勸後生笑容容，勸你討妻骨頭重； 生有子女傳後代，免致來變游應公。
英文翻譯	The first concern is pork soup; the second one is duck cooked with ginger sprouts. The third one is fish half well done; the fourth one is to live as long as possible with <u>Mei (lover)</u> . In February, flowers are blooming, and willow tree leaves are falling down. The sprouts of trees are budding, spreading to my bed, and I wait for your coming. I think of the hardship of taking care of a child; my back is wet with the child's poo and pee. I walk to the riverside to wash myself and feel the coldness of the wind and water with snow and frost. <u>A Mei (lover)</u> is falling asleep in the bed, and I open your door with my hands. I kneel down by you, and wish to tie up our thousand-year-long relationship. Seven, I delightfully advice the young to marry with a strong woman whose bones weigh more. You must have children to carry your family name, and don't become a Mr. Yu-in (an old bachelor).



