Symbolic Ethnicity among the New Generation of Taiwanese Hakka

TANOUE, Tomoyoshi

1. Introduction

Since the end of the 1980s, “ethnic group” has been an indispensable term in describing Taiwanese society. Namely, a recognition that Taiwanese society consists of four major ethnic groups, i.e. Indigenous People, Holo, Hakka, and Mainlanders, had been broadly accepted. However, the circumstances surrounding the concept of ethnic groups or ethnicity is undergoing a significant change. For one, so-called “traditional culture” is rapidly disappearing among younger generations, and for another, inter-ethnic marriages are not at all unusual today. At such a time, what does ethnicity mean in Taiwanese society? Is it no more than a relic from the past? This study is intended to consider the role of ethnicity in modern Taiwan society through the analysis of the Hakka Basic Law.

On January 5, 2010, the Legislative Yuan passed the Hakka Basic Law, thereby giving legal ground for the recent promotion of Hakka cultural policies; thus, this legislation was welcomed by most of the people in Taiwan. This is the second ethnic law subsequent to the Indigenous Peoples Basic Law, which was enacted in 2005. The unique point of this law concerns the definition of the Hakka. In article 2, it defines the meaning of the terms referred to this law as follows.

Article 2 Definitions:

1. Hakka person: refers to any individual who has Hakka bloodline or Hakka origin, and self-identifies as a Hakka person.

2. Hakka ethnic group: refers to a group that consists of Hakka persons.

3. Hakka language: refers to variants used in Taiwan, i.e. Si-xian¹, Hai-lu, Da-pu, Rao-ping, Zhao-an etc, and habitual phraseology preserved in each area or the various new ecolects

¹ This paper uses Hanyu Pinyin for Chinese Character.
which emerged because of adding modern vocabulary.

4. Hakka population: refers to statistical results of population research conducted by the Council for Hakka Affairs, Executive Yuan.

5. Hakka Affairs: refers to public affairs concerned with the Hakka ethnic group.

Ordinarily, we would consider the ability to speak the Hakka language to be the most important criterion in determining whether an individual is Hakka or not. Although architecture, cuisine, clothing, or religious belief are also presented as Hakka culture, it is almost impossible to show common cultural characteristics shared among people who are called Hakka. However, this law does not consider language as a criterion for the definition of Hakka ethnicity because an increasing number of young Hakka people cannot fluently speak or even understand the Hakka language. Under such a circumstance, it is difficult to consider the language as an indicator for identifying Hakka people. This study explains the perception of Hakka ethnicity in Taiwanese society; specifically, Taiwanese people are now adhering to "symbolic ethnicity," and this trend will be used to recognize it as a part of the Hakka ethnicity.

"Symbolic ethnicity" is a concept that has been used to refer to the ethnicity of the descendants of European immigrants in the United States. In the early 20th century, the expectation was widely accepted that the immigrants from various countries would be assimilated into American society; hence that ethnicity would gradually lose its role. M. Hansen, in contrast to the straight-line assimilation theory, focused attention on the intergenerational differences of ethnicity. Hansen discussed, that compared to the second generation (the sons and daughters of immigrants), who wanted to forget and lose as many of the evidence of their foreign origin as they could shuffle off, the attitude of the third generation toward culture of immigrant generation was wildly different. They were American-born, and their speech was the same as that of those with whom they associated. Thus, the third generation had no reason to feel any inferiority. H. Gans argued the role of ethnicity in the third and fourth generation, and expressed that a new kind of ethnic involvement might be occurring among them. Gans coined the term "symbolic ethnicity" to indicate the ethnicity
of white Americans whose ethnic characteristics had disappeared. In his view, this symbolic ethnicity is characterized by a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or that of the old country: a love for and a pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated in everyday behavior (Gans, 1979).

2. The Hakka movement and Hakka cultural policy

The purpose of the Hakka Basic Law is to give legal ground for the recent promotion of Hakka cultural policies. In this section, let us take a glance at the history of the Hakka ethnic movement and Hakka cultural policies that began to be implemented subsequent to the movement.

In Taiwan, since the early 1980s, the environment for civil society and NGOs has changed dramatically, allowing for many and autonomous NGOs to become established entirely on the basis of local initiative and resources. The social movement NGOs established in this period facilitated and fostered Taiwan’s democratic transition and transformed the power relationship between the state and civil society (Hsiao, 2006:226). Social movements in this period span a wide range of issues, e.g., environment, aborigine, gender, labors, peasants, etc. Then each group began to claim their own interest toward authority. The Hakka movement, which began at the end of the 1980s, the same as the aboriginal movement, was focused on the ethnic problem.

The main issue of the Hakka movement was the language problem. The indigenous languages in Taiwan (Holo, Hakka, and the aboriginal languages) had been given low status under the “national language movement” until the 1980s. These languages had been positioned as “dialects,” and were strictly prohibited in the schools and restricted in the media. As the result of the “national language movement,” Mandarin had spread all over Taiwan as “the national language,” however, indigenous tongues were no longer passed on to younger generation.

The beginning of the Hakka Movement goes back to the publication of a magazine Hakka Storm (Kejia fengyun) by some Hakka people in 1987. They also established the Association for Promoting Hakka Interest (Kejia quanyi cujinhui), which held a massive demonstration at the end of
1988 in which 6000–7000 people came from all over Taiwan to join in. In this demonstration, they employed the slogan “reclaim mother tongue to me,” and demanded to open TV programs in the Hakka language, to revise article 20 of the Broadcasting and Television Act from a restrictive clause to a guarantee clause about dialect usage, and to establish a pluralistic and open language policy (Hakka Storm 15:57, 1989).

Following the Hakka ethnic movement to require the recognition of identity and to preserve their culture, the government started to implement policies intended for the protection and development of Hakka culture. On the central level, the Council for Hakka Affairs was founded in June 2001, and the organizations that deal with Hakka affairs were created in some of the local governments.

Hakka cultural policy, which has been carried out in recent years, can be divided into three main aspects: preservation of the Hakka language, encouragement of academic research about Hakka, and promotion of Hakka culture. Similar to other indigenous languages in Taiwan, the Hakka language began to be taught in elementary and junior high school, and a Hakka TV channel producing programs mainly in the Hakka language was established in July 2003. On the aspect of academic research, several research centers and graduate schools focused on Hakka have been established in universities all over Taiwan. Concerning the promotion of culture, and in order to introduce their culture, several Hakka cultural parks have been built, and Hakka cultural festivals are being held every year in many cities.

3. Contents of the Hakka Basic Law

The draft of the Hakka Basic Law was sent from Executive Yuan to Legislative Yuan on October 30, 2009. At the same time the other draft made out by four members of Legislative Yuan, i.e., Guan Bi-ling, Qiu Yi-ying, Hou Cai-feng and Ke Jian-ming, also was sent there, apart from them 22 members of Legislative Yuan were cosignatories of this draft. Although the content of this law that finally passed Legislative Yuan was based on the draft by Executive Yuan, some
amendments had been added to the bill during the enactment process.

Deliberation on the two drafts of the Hakka Basic Law started in the Ministry of the Interior on December 28, 2009, and the bill was passed in the Legislative Yuan on January 5, 2010, and was promulgated on January 27. Hereinafter, according to Zhong Guo-yun’s grouping, let us show the content of the Hakka Basic Law (Zhong, 2010:58-72).

(1) Definition of terms
Article 2 provides the definition of terms mentioned in this law. Please refer to Introduction.

(2) Actor of policy implementation
Article 3 and article 4 stipulate that Executive Yuan shall establish a promotion committee and may convene with a meeting consisting of a committee chairman and ministers related to Hakka affairs.

(3) Area development plan and priority cultural development areas
Article 5 provides that the government shall consider the interest and development of the Hakka ethnic group in formulating a policy and planning area development. Article 6 provides that the government shall designate townships, cities, and districts where over one third of the population is Hakka as priority cultural development areas, and enhance inheritance of the Hakka culture, language, and cultural industry. Specifically, in priority cultural development areas, place the Hakka language as an official language, and civil servants and teachers in these areas shall improve the ability of the Hakka language.

(4) Addition of the category of the national examination concerned with Hakka
Article 7 provides that the government shall have a category related to Hakka affairs in national examination. In response to this, civil service exams were added to a new Hakka affairs executive category in 2010.

(5) Stipulations concerned with the Hakka language
Article 8 provides that the government shall administer a Hakka Language Certification examination and build a database of the Hakka language in order to encourage the restoration of inheritance, development of research, and cultivation of human resources. Article 9 provides that the government
agency shall realize a barrier-free environment for the Hakka language. Article 10 provides that the government shall offer intensive measures, and make an effort to integrate schools, families, and communities, so as to develop a learning environment for the Hakka language.

(6) Right of access to media

Article 12 provides that the government shall guarantee the right of the Hakka ethnic group to access the media and help to establish a nationwide radio and television channel.

(7) Academic research about Hakka and global Hakka cultural exchange

Article 11 provides that the government shall encourage and promote academic research about Hakka, and to establish graduate schools, undergraduate schools, and academic courses related to Hakka. Article 13 provides the government to promote integrating the global Hakka ethnic group, and let Taiwan become a center of exchanges and researches of global Hakka culture.

(8) National Hakka Day

Article 14 provides that the government shall determine a National Hakka Day, so as to manifest the Hakka ethnic group’s contribution to multiculturalism in Taiwan.

Most of the contents of drafts are in common between The Executive Yuan's proposal and the counterproposal made by legislators, the most controversial issue related to the enactment process for the Hakka Basic Law was associated with the definition of Hakka people. The next section will show the argument about the definition of Hakka people in the Legislative Yuan.

4. The argument about the definition of Hakka people

As previously intimated, Article 2 of the Hakka Basic Law shows the definition of the terms related to this law. Although the promulgated bill provides the definition of a Hakka person as “any individual who has Hakka bloodline or Hakka origin, and self-identifies as a Hakka person,” neither the Executive Yuan's proposal nor the counterproposal showed the same definition of Hakka people. The Executive Yuan's proposal defines a Hakka person as “any individual who has Hakka bloodline or Hakka origin, or is familiar with the Hakka language and culture, and self-identifies as a Hakka
person,” and the counterproposal made by legislators defines a Hakka person as “any individual who has Hakka bloodline, and is familiar with the Hakka language, and self-identifies as a Hakka person” (The Legislative Yuan Gazette 99(4), 2010).

Shih Cheng-feng cites three elements as criteria of Hakka ethnicity. Figure 1 shows the structure of Hakka ethnicity (Shih, 2004:43-46).

![Diagram of Hakka ethnicity](image)

**Figure 1** The structure of Hakka ethnicity

**Note:**

a: Any individual who self-identifies as a Hakka person, and recognizes that he/she has Hakka bloodline, and can speak the Hakka language.

b: Any individual who self-identifies as a Hakka person, and recognizes that he/she has Hakka bloodline, and cannot speak the Hakka language.

c: Any individual who self-identifies as a Hakka person, and denies that he/she has Hakka bloodline, and can speak the Hakka language.

d: Any individual who self-identifies as a Hakka person, and denies that he/she has Hakka bloodline, and cannot speak the Hakka language.
e: Any individual who self-identifies as not a Hakka person, and recognizes that he/she has Hakka bloodline, and can speak the Hakka language.

f: Any individual who does not self-identify as a Hakka person, and recognizes that he/she has Hakka bloodline, and cannot speak the Hakka language.

g: Any individual who does not self-identify as a Hakka person, and denies that he/she has Hakka bloodline, and can speak the Hakka language.

h: Any individual who does not self-identify as a Hakka person, and denies that he/she has Hakka bloodline, and cannot speak the Hakka language.

Source: Shih (2004)

Let us now compare the definition of Hakka people by the Executive Yuan's proposal and that by the counterproposal made by legislators in reference to Figure 1. The scope of the counterproposal is very clear, as it contains all individuals who meet the criteria of self-identity, bloodline, and language, which correspond to the set \{a\}. The Executive Yuan's proposal demands the criteria of bloodline or culture/language, and self-identity, thus it corresponds to the sets \{a, b, c\}. Actually, the set \{d\} is almost non-existent; the Executive Yuan's proposal is virtually the same and considers that everyone who identifies him/herself as a Hakka person is a Hakka person.

As a result of the discussion by the Legislative Yuan, they decided to adopt bloodline as well as self-identity as criteria in determining whether an individual is a Hakka person or not, but language was excluded from the list of criteria. It corresponds to the sets \{a, b\} in Figure 1.

5. Recognition of symbolic ethnicity

From the discussion above, we can conclude as follows. First, subjective criterion is becoming more important in recognizing Hakka ethnicity. The definition of Hakka people in the Hakka Basic Law is one of the obvious proofs of it. Second, plurality of ethnicity is being placed with more emphasis than singularity. The enactment of the Hakka Basic Law shows that the argument was
based on the assumption that an individual has plural ethnicity. As the result of the argument in the Legislative Yuan, the Executive Yuan’s proposal passed, thereby indicating that the trend toward recognizing symbolic ethnicity is indubitable in contemporary Taiwan.

Enactment of the Hakka Basic Law is expected to promote Hakka cultural policies that intend to restore the Hakka language, and at the same time indicate that those who cannot understand the Hakka language, especially younger generations, are going to be involved in the targets of Hakka cultural policy. If the young Hakka generation who grew up far away from the traditional settlements of Hakka people sustain or acquire Hakka ethnicity, it should be inevitable that their ethnicity become symbolic, further increasing the number of young Hakka people who cannot speak their mother tongue well in the traditional settlements. From this circumstance, one may say that Hakka ethnicity all over Taiwan is approaching symbolic ethnicity.

However, the new style of Hakka ethnicity is quite different from that of the Hakka movement in the 1980s. In the “reclaim mother tongue to me” movement, they declared the Hakka movement was the movement aiming to preserve the dignity of their mother tongue and their continuity as a language group, and it was necessary for them to protect their perfect dignity as human beings. Of course it also has to be noted that the social consensus about the definition of Hakka people has not been fully formulated.

Although the new definition of Hakka refers to a different style of ethnicity as compared to that of the Hakka cultural movement in the 1980s, the redefinition of the Hakka ethnicity is meaningful due to the inclusion of the young Hakka generation, many of whom speak Mandarin as their first language instead of the Hakka language. Despite the lack of language requirements in the definition of the Hakka people, the Hakka Basic Law did not abandon the objective of sustaining and developing their language. Indeed, two distinct goals are immanent in this law, i.e., the aim to maintain the Hakka language group alongside the active recognitions of symbolic ethnicity as an important part of the Taiwanese Hakka ethnicity.

References


*Hakka Storm* 15, Taipei, Hakka Storm Magazine, 1989

*The Legislative Yuan Gazette* 99(4), 2010