People who identify themselves as Hakka live in a wide variety of contexts, both in China (including Hong Kong and Taiwan) and overseas. Unlike those who are more recent immigrants to their current places of residence, the Hakka villagers of Tsuen Wan, a district on the southwest side of the New Territories of Hong Kong, consider themselves to be the original people of their area. They sometimes use the term benturen, meaning “original people of the place,” for themselves. This is in contrast to the term bendiren (usually rendered Punti), with the same meaning, which is used by and in reference to those early settlers of the New Territories who speak Cantonese. Like the Punti, the Hakka are defined as indigenous by the Hong Kong government, and are allowed special rights.

What does it mean to be Hakka, for people who are long-settled, deeply attached, even now, to their land and the tombs of their ancestors (Hayes 1991, 1993), and who were once the sole occupiers of an area and its first identified inhabitants, sharing it only with the boat people based in its harbor? Their status as original people makes them different from the people of Shung Him Tong (see Constable, this volume) and the other later arrivals who constitute the majority of Hong Kong’s population. 2

An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the 1991 conference of the Association for Asian Studies, at a panel entitled “What Does It Mean to Be Hakka?”

1. Ronald Ng discusses the symbiotic relationship between the Hakka and fishing people (1969:54). In Tsuen Wan the division was less precise because the Hakka also participated in fishing and seafood-gathering.

2. There may also be significant cultural differences between the two original land-dwelling groups of the New Territories, the Hakka and Cantonese. Although one important comparative study of ethnicity in a market town has been done by C. Fred Blake (1981), existing ethnographies of rural Cantonese and Hakka communities do not permit comparison because those concerning Cantonese people were almost all done in large,
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This question, asked now, must have a different and more complex answer than it would have had fifty years ago. The Hakka people of Tsuen Wan now inhabit a predominantly Cantonese-speaking city, and have lost the economic activities that once brought them together in shared enterprise. Some of the visible markers of Hakka cultural difference, acknowledged by them as expressions of ethnic identity, have disappeared. These include features of women’s dress, the heavy outdoor work done by women, unicorn dancing, and the singing of mountain songs while working together. They are now virtually gone in Tsuen Wan, although somewhat in evidence in more remote areas of the New Territories.

During the past twenty-five years I have done two periods of fieldwork in Kwan Mun Hau, a two-lineage village in central Tsuen Wan, visited frequently, and developed close relationships with some families. Initially, the question of their Hakka identity was of little concern to me, and my field notes show that my informants rarely mentioned the fact that they are Hakka. More recently, I have begun discussing this question with them and paying closer attention to single-lineage villages, while the few Hakka ethnographies were done in small, multisurname villages. Without controlling size and wealth, systematic comparisons cannot be done with confidence.

3. These include wearing a rectangular headcloth and/or a flat hat called a “cool hat” with a black cloth fringe, an apron made of three panels stitched together, and relatively plain, dark clothes. The apron, headcloth, and hat are often fastened on with hand-woven decorative bands with colored patterns (see Elizabeth Johnson 1976). These items of dress, especially the cool hat, may sometimes be worn by others. Clothing is not a strict ethnic marker, especially given the fluidity of the boundaries between language groups.

4. In this region lion dancing is associated with Cantonese people and unicorn dancing with Hakka. See Hayes (1977a:225).

5. Hakka wedding and funeral laments were also distinctive. See Blake (1978) and Elizabeth Johnson (1988).

6. During 1968–70 and 1975–76 I lived and did research in Kwan Mun Hau Village. My first research was supported by Population Council, and my second by the Joint Centre on Modern East Asia. I would particularly like to thank the people of Kwan Mun Hau for their hospitality and help. Yau Siu-kwong, in particular, has given me valuable and carefully-considered advice on earlier versions of this paper. Yau Yuk-lin, Yau Yuk-kuen, Yau Chan Shek-ying, Yau Tsang Yung-hei, Yau Tin-loi, and Kwok Yung-heng and his wife have also been very helpful. I would also like to thank those people who have provided comments and suggestions, including James Hayes, James L. Watson, and Graham Johnson.

7. See Nicole Constable’s comments on the question of anthropologists’ frequent earlier lack of attention to ethnicity in her introduction to this volume.

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some of the problems raised in this volume. For example, do the Hakka of Kwan Mun Hau consider themselves to be “guest people” in the sense of being sojourners? Do they consider themselves stigmatized because of being Hakka, as in the examples described by Nicole Constable and Mary Erbaugh? Is the assertion of their Hakka identity important to them, and something they would use to contrast themselves with others or as a basis for action, as suggested by Howard Martin, Constable, and Myron Cohen? Finally, in the present situation of extraordinary change, is their Hakka identity something they feel they must preserve and defend? I have concluded that most people would give negative answers to these questions, and therefore I must ask why this should be. In analyzing this problem, we must examine more closely the historical background of Tsuen Wan, the nature of the social organization that developed there, and, in particular, aspects of the political context in which Tsuen Wan people find themselves and in which, unlike the majority of Hong Kong people, they actively participate.

THE VILLAGES OF CONTEMPORARY TSUEN WAN

The new city of Tsuen Wan on the southwest side of Hong Kong’s New Territories, with its industrial base and population of nearly eight hundred thousand, might seem an improbable place to find Hakka people, who are often stereotyped as being poor and rural. A walk through the dingy industrial districts and high-rise residential developments of that city reveals the occasional surprise: Hakka villages, their names on entrance arches, their ancestral halls prominent among the houses, and their protective shrines nearby. With some effort, the regional temple to Tian Hou, queen of heaven, can also be found, her view recently changed from a prospect of coastal fields and rivers to a complex of high-rise apartment blocks. There are about thirty villages in Tsuen Wan District, all of them Hakka, as identified by themselves, outside observers, and the Hong Kong government (Hayes 1991:109). Some of the villages remain outside the bounds of the city in their original locations in the foothills of Tai Mou Shan, the biggest mountain in Hong Kong, and on the nearby islands, but the majority of the original Hakka people now live within the urban area. Most of these villages have been moved, in their entirety, to new village-style houses in more peripheral areas to make way for urban development. Such moves, arrived at through protracted negotiations between the Hong Kong government and the
indigenous villagers, are a common feature of the contemporary development of the New Territories. Memories of the rural life of more than a generation ago remain, however. In Kwan Mun Hau, the village I know best because it was my fieldwork site, the small shop/mahjong parlor/social center still bears the name Country Village Store. In the small amount of space among the houses, some families have tiny vegetable plots and raise a few chickens. Many material aspects of their former rural life, based on farming, fishing, and firewood-cutting, are preserved in the neighboring village of Sam Tung Uk, which, because of its distinctive Hakka architecture (it is an enclosed compound with a central ancestral hall) has been restored as a museum.

RECENT HISTORY

There were approximately seven hundred villages in the New Territories in 1898, and slightly less than half of the population at that time was Hakka, the great majority of the remainder being land- or water-dwelling Cantonese speakers (Hayes 1983:4). The Hakka people of the New Territories are part of a continuous line of Hakka settlement from Bao'an County (now incorporated into the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone) through eastern Guangdong and into Fujian, these being the most recent points of origin of the Hakka migrants to the New Territories during the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) (Blake 1981:10). There are areas of the New Territories in which the majority of the original population is Hakka, including Sai Kung, Sha Tin, the Hang Hau Peninsula and the Tai Po region (Hong Kong 1957:38). In Sha Tau Kok (Allen Uck Lunn Chun 1985:230) and Tsuen Wan all the indigenous villages are Hakka.

The Hakka people of Tsuen Wan are in many ways different from the others presented in this volume, and not simply because they are now urban, as are those studied by Ellen Oxfeld. They differ also in the fact that they consider Tsuen Wan to be their native place, where they belong to an integrated complex of lineages and villages, a separate social system located within the physical environment of the city. Their lineage and marriage ties extend through the New Territories and across the border into Guangdong. Their tombs, beginning with those of the founding ancestors, who arrived near the beginning of the Qing dynasty, are widely dispersed through the hills of the New Territories. Unlike the Hakka people of Calcutta (Oxfeld, this volume), they do not
consider that they are "still guest people" who might move on, but "Tsuen Wan people" and "original local people." The memory of their migration to Tsuen Wan, originally from North China and later from adjacent areas of Southeast China, is preserved in their genealogies, in oral tradition concerning the arrival and settlement of ancestors, and, in the case of the Yau lineage of Kwan Mun Hau Village, in the couplet on the boards hung outside the ancestral hall at festivals, which states

The descendants of those who came from Henan continue;
The customs of the North are retained.

Although Tsuen Wan people do not consider themselves to be sojourners, this is not to say that emigration from Tsuen Wan did not take place. From the middle of the nineteenth century through the first decades of the twentieth, Tsuen Wan men went abroad looking for improved economic opportunities. A few found them, but the majority did not return wealthy. The tablet commemorating the 1897 renovation of the Tian Hou Temple records large numbers of donations from Tsuen Wan emigrants in many parts of the world, as widely scattered as Hawaii, South Africa, Panama, the Caribbean, North America, and Southeast Asia, although Tsuen Wan had only about three thousand people at that time (Hayes 1983:115–16). The dispersed nature of the migration and the fact that contributions were sent back suggests that these emigrants saw themselves as sojourners abroad, although some stayed permanently in Southeast Asia and established lineage branches there (Aijmer 1967). In contrast to more remote areas of the New Territories, where emigration has increased during the twentieth century (e.g., James Watson 1975), it has become less necessary in Tsuen Wan because of the new economic opportunities there, although recently some people have sought foreign residence to improve their political security and their children's educational opportunities.

Most of the earliest members of the Tsuen Wan lineages arrived there in the first half of the eighteenth century. That they settled on land that had once been occupied by others is suggested by the fact that they paid "land tax" to the Tang (Deng) lineage of the New Territories. This implies that the Tang had had earlier tenants there, before the earlier Qing evacuation of the coast (1662–69), although their control could have been asserted after Hakka settlement of the region (Hayes 1983:118–19). Regardless, the rescinding of the evacuation order allowed Hakka people to move onto the vacated lands. Local oral tradition suggests there may
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have been evidence of earlier settlers. One variant of the story associated with the Kwan Mun Hau earth god shrine to the Nine Honorable Grandfathers states that the Chan lineage founder was joined in doing martial arts by the ghosts of nine men who had lived in the area making salt, and who had died defending it from pirates. After his first rice harvest, he is said to have built a shrine in their honor, and they have continued to be worshiped as protectors of the village.

Oral tradition about early settlers also includes Tsuen Wan people's assumption that language affiliation, the basis of their cultural identity, is not fixed, but may change over time. Several people I interviewed expressed the conviction that some of the Tsuen Wan lineages were originally Hoklo or Cantonese, but became Hakka over time. A member of one lineage said that one of its branches became Chaozhou (Teochew) after emigrating to Southeast Asia. A well-known example of language change in the New Territories is the Liao lineage of Sheung Shui, now Cantonese, whose members say they were once Hakka and who still maintain close ties with some small Hakka lineages (Baker 1968:28, 38-41, 195). James Hayes found lineages and villages that claimed to have changed language affiliation over time, and he also reports that there are areas of the New Territories where a mixture of Cantonese and Hakka is spoken, and some villages where there are speakers of both languages (1977a:29-30, 207). In Tsuen Wan local people discussed past changes in dialect affiliation by their own and other local lineages without concern at acknowledging that they had not always been Hakka. This may be because Tsuen Wan people have had little involvement in the twentieth-century Hakka-identity movement, with its concern for asserting the existence of essential and distinctive Hakka characteristics and a unique history.8

THE NEW TERRITORIES POLITICAL CONTEXT

In 1898 the New Territories was leased to Britain, joining the original colony of Hong Kong Island, and its later addition of Kowloon. The eighty-four thousand indigenous inhabitants were guaranteed special rights by the Convention of Peking and administrative proclamations made at that time (Hayes 1991:116). Since then these have been defined to include the right to maintain rights to their family and lineage lands,

8. This is in contrast to the village of Shung Him Tong, made up of Hakka people of diverse origins, described by Constable in this volume.
although these were registered and became subject to regulation of use and even the possibility of resumption, with compensation, by government; the right to bury their dead in the hills; the right to manage property and kinship relations according to various aspects of Chinese customary law, as interpreted by themselves and the district officers; and, after World War II, the right to elect representatives to the governing bodies of the New Territories (Hayes 1993:96, personal communication; Graham E. Johnson 1973:110; 1977).

Early in this century, some New Territories villages were moved to make way for reservoir construction. In recent years, as the New Territories development plan has involved the creation of new cities where market towns had been before, old villages have been destroyed and the villagers moved to new housing after negotiations to determine the terms of settlement. These include the costs of the necessary rituals (Hayes 1991). In such situations, agricultural land has been converted through various mechanisms to building land, which often, if wisely managed, has provided villagers with a new source of income from the rental of flats and buildings. Those Kwan Mun Hau families who had larger holdings and who managed to keep their land during and after World War II now have comfortable incomes from rents, and the two lineages of the village, the Yau and Chan, have regular income from the urban property held in the trusts of their founding ancestors and various smaller trusts. In the late 1960s the Yau lineage had the reputation of being the best-managed and most prosperous in Tsuen Wan. The income from the urban property of this lineage now enables the members not only to maintain their hall and tombs and to worship at the tombs annually in impressive style, but also to divide cash profits on a regular basis. The Chan lineage also sends buses of members to worship at the tombs of ancestors during the Chong Yang Festival in the ninth lunar month. Over a period of at least two weeks, both Yan and Chan lineages worship at the tombs of their ancestors in descending order, starting with those immediately above their local founders and ending with recent generations. Large numbers of people and impressive offerings are involved in the worship of ancestors, and banquets follow.

Lineages and villages are not coterminous in Tsuen Wan, as some villages include more than one lineage and some lineages have members in more than one village or hamlet. The villages of central Tsuen Wan are also drawn together by their common worship at the Tian Hou Temple, and collectively sponsored opera performances celebrating Tian Hou’s birthday (by Cantonese, not Hakka troupes) have recently
been resumed. A chamber adjoining the Tian Hou Temple is devoted to commemorating twenty-seven martyrs killed in a prolonged mid-nineteenth-century conflict with Shing Mun, a cluster of villages higher up the mountain that were moved in the late 1920s to make way for a reservoir (Hayes 1977b). Despite the temporal correspondence of this battle with the Hakka-Punti wars, these villages were also Hakka, and there is no written or oral record of conflict with people of other dialect groups. Every year at the autumn equinox the Tsuen Wan Rural Committee gathers here, their presence announced by the temple bell, for formal worship first of Tian Hou, and then of the martyrs. They also worship annually at the collective tombs, where unidentified bones are placed (Hayes 1991:128).

The continuation of this practice suggests that Tsuen Wan local leaders still feel loyalty to the region they represent, loyalty that must be expressed through ritual as well as political participation. According to Ronald Ng, “In a Hakka community there does not seem to be a decrease in the intensity of loyalty from family to clan, clan to village, or village to community as is experienced in other parts of the New Territories. This may largely account for the stability of Hakka society” (1969:59) In Kwan Mun Hau people affirmed the close relationship between the two lineages, and the pennant used by the Yau lineage proclaims that “the Yau lineage of Tsuen Wan sweeps its tombs,” rather than identifying them with their primary village. Tsuen Wan was originally united by an alliance (yue) and a governing body of elders called the Tsuen On Kuk, which met before World War II in the Tian Hou Temple and regulated local affairs (Graham E. Johnson 1977:no). The unity of the locality is now strongly reinforced by the current political system, which gives a degree of political power and considerable eco-


10. Responsibility for the occasional worship of affinal ancestors and others with whom those responsible have kinship ties is a topic that merits further investigation. This is not done routinely, but only for those who are apparently special cases, perhaps people without descendants. The Yau lineage of Tsuen Wan worships at a tomb shared by a couple who may be the founder’s wife’s parents and a long-term servant of their founding ancestor. According to James Hayes, the second ancestral hall of the Ho lineage of Muk Min Ha Village in Tsuen Wan is devoted to the founder’s wife’s parents, and the Chung lineage of Hoi Pa Village has taken responsibility for the tombs of some unknown people (personal communication, 1992). Allen Chun also describes the worship of affinal ancestors (1985:290–91).
nomic advantage to the indigenous people. Each district has its rural committee, which represents its original people to the government, and the New Territories as a whole has an advisory body called the Rural Consultative Committee (Heung Yee Kuk), a formal system that was instituted in 1948 (Hayes 1991:113; Graham E. Johnson 1973:112). These bodies help to create bonds of common interest among the indigenous people regardless of their dialect affiliation.

Their status as indigenous people of the New Territories is important to Tsuen Wan people—apparently much more important than the fact that they are also Hakka. The Tsuen Wan people I interviewed in the late 1960s in general did not spontaneously compare themselves with those of other dialect groups and rarely made statements about Hakka characteristics. Those statements that were made were often not flattering, having to do primarily with the hard work of women as opposed to men. Unlike the Hakka Christians of diverse origins quoted by Nicole Constable (this volume), the Tsuen Wan people I interviewed did not show familiarity with the literature or discourse extolling the superiority of Hakka traits and the historical accomplishments of Hakka individuals. In Kwan Mun Hau in the late 1960s, a few men belonged to the Chongzheng Hui (an international Hakka association), although this may have been a means of expressing their pro-Taiwan sentiments in a time of severe political polarization. The greater portion of the Kwan Mun Hau people were left-wing, and so to join this association would have been a political impossibility. Furthermore, to do so would seem, I would think, redundant, because being Hakka is an assumed part of their identity and there are no apparent instrumental reasons for asserting it. Other aspects of their identity are more salient, and useful, these being the fact that they are Tsuen Wan people and New Territories natives. Both of these constitute defined groups, while Hakka is an unbounded category. The terms “Tsuen Wan people” and “New Territories natives” have political definitions, and both carry political and eco-

11. Sharon Carstens (this volume) found the people of Pulai to show similar attitudes and behavior, in contrast to the people of Shung Him Tong (Constable, this volume).

12. Examples of this rhetoric can be found in the publications of the Tsung Tsin (Hakka) Association in Vancouver, B.C., which includes Hakka people who immigrated to Canada from a remarkable variety of countries around the world. For example, their twentieth-anniversary publication includes this statement: “The Hakkas are considered to be the cream of the Chinese race. They are being described as hard working, independent, patriotic, willing to accept challenges, never satisfied with less than the best in the pursuit of education and a strong cohesive family orientation.”
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omic benefits. To emphasize language differences within this context, at present, would seem not at all advantageous. In general, Tsuen Wan natives in the late 1960s participated only in the Sports Association and the Chamber of Commerce, both associations of their own creation. The voluntary associations proliferating at that time met the needs of immigrants who lacked the kinship and locality ties of the Tsuen Wan people (Graham E. Johnson 1973).

RELATIONS WITH NON-HAKKA PEOPLE

After an initial resistance to the appearance of non-Hakka outsiders in their district, Tsuen Wan people seem to have developed an open-minded attitude towards them, especially as the economic advantage of the rents they paid became evident. Some people said they learned to understand the dialects their tenants spoke. However, during the process of village relocation, James Hayes observed a clear process of “purification,” in which nonlineage property owners were denied the right to move to the new village sites, “to regain the original lineage composition of the settlements” (1991:122). It seems that they were asserting their prior rights as original settlers, and disadvantaging later claims.

The men I interviewed were able, when questioned, to make comparisons between themselves and the immigrants to Tsuen Wan, although they were thinking of themselves as indigenous people, not necessarily as Hakka. Their answers are revealing both in the nature of the self-image they show and in the extent of consensus they reflect. They stated that outsiders were more capable and enterprising than natives, and much better able to earn money. The bitterness of their earlier poverty and the hard work required to survive were very important to them, and were freely acknowledged by both men and women. Hayes says: “The Tsuen Wan area was poor. The local elders never failed to impress this point upon one” (1983:123). C. Fred Blake's work on ethnicity in the town of Sai Kung in the New Territories describes an awareness of a “legacy of poverty” (1981:150) as being characteristic of Hakka people there; this is also the case in Tsuen Wan. Their willingness to state this may be more typical of Hakka people.

The men interviewed also said that outsiders were forced by circumstances to be self-reliant, and that they were free “like birds” to go wherever there might be opportunities, while natives were tied to one place. On the other hand, they said that they themselves were able to depend on the property their ancestors had left them, and that they
were unified when necessity demanded it and would support each other in conflicts. Outsiders were fragmented and had only voluntary associations to bring them together. Nicole Constable illustrates the role of voluntary associations well in her chapter, showing how Hakka immigrants of diverse origins created a village, church, and cemetery that provided them with an identity contrasting with those around them (this volume). In contrast, Tsuen Wan people do not need to assert their Hakka identity because they can draw on their long-established lineage, village, and regional ties for support. 

Despite Kwan Mun Hau men’s statements that they felt somewhat inadequate in relation to the newcomers around them, I never heard anyone express a sense of being stigmatized because of being Hakka, despite the assertions in the literature that such discrimination exists (cf. Constable and Erbaugh, this volume). According to my observations, being Hakka was neither a matter of shame nor pride, but simply one aspect of their being, acknowledged, but not asserted. Only once was I told a story suggesting discriminatory attitudes on the part of others—it was reported that a man who married a Hakka woman was told that it was like marrying a water buffalo, but the story ended positively with the teller reporting that the woman demonstrated her worth during a water shortage by being able to carry water up six flights of stairs. This lack of sense of stigma may come in part from the fact that Tsuen Wan people dominated their region, and had no nearby wealthy or more powerful members of another dialect group with whom they might be compared. One also has to ask whether it might be a stereotype that has been perpetuated by the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writings on the Hakka, with little social reality.

**EXPRESSIONS OF HAKKA CULTURAL DIFFERENCE**

An indicator of whether Tsuen Wan people feel that being Hakka is an important part of their identity, worthy of preservation, is the fate of their language in a situation in which they are surrounded with speakers of other dialects, overwhelmingly Cantonese. These include even their tenants, who are now half the population of Kwan Mun Hau Village. Before the Second World War, Hakka was virtually universal in the region, and the schools taught in Hakka, with the exception of one Cantonese school that existed even then. Those who worked outside the area had to be able to function in Cantonese. One man told me that he and his father went to the Cantonese-language school because it was
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appropriate to do so when they were surrounded by Cantonese people. In Kwan Mun Hau, by the late 1960s all except the oldest women and one or two illiterate men were able to speak Cantonese. Today middle-aged and younger people speak unaccented Cantonese and no one would be aware of their Hakka identity outside the village context.

Within the village, however, and when village people are together in public places such as teahouses, those who are middle-aged and older use Hakka by choice. At the 1992 Chong Yang tomb worship of the Yau lineage, Hakka was predominant, although people switched comfortably back and forth to accommodate non-Hakka wives and those children who do not speak it. The ancestors were addressed in Hakka. The previous year, the women I observed making offerings at the ancestral halls and shrines during the Winter Solstice Festival also spoke among themselves in Hakka. Likewise, the men attending the worship at the martyrs' shrine spoke Hakka among themselves and it was the language of the ceremony. Their continued use of Hakka in situations where it would be equally convenient to speak Cantonese suggests that it remains meaningful to them as a familiar mother tongue and a symbol of shared identity. That identity has many aspects, however, including their ties to their locality, villages, and lineages. Tsuen Wan people's general lack of spontaneous assertion of their Hakka identity suggests that the locality aspects may be more important.

One recent development that may help to perpetuate their use of Hakka is the reactivation of ties with related lineages in the Hakka-speaking areas over the border in Guangdong, where most of the people do not speak Cantonese. I have never heard concern expressed that the language should be preserved, however, although young people who do not understand it may be teased within the village. One man who is deeply involved in lineage affairs and local history said that he is making no effort to teach Hakka to his son, because it will be of no use to him and, ironically, because he might be teased by other people if he used it. The fact that Hakka continues to be used at present among the local people, who are equally fluent in Cantonese, suggests that it is considered appropriate in this context and is comfortably familiar, but the realization that it may disappear within a generation does not seem to be cause for concern. One factor mitigating against the preservation of Hakka is the fact that many men now marry Cantonese women or those of other origins, again a situation that does not seem to be cause for concern, even though this may mean that these women do not know how to conduct rituals such as ancestor worship correctly. In the past
Tsuen Wan men obtained wives from within the district, but also from widely dispersed Hakka areas of the New Territories, including Tai Po, Sha Tin, and Yuen Long. As marriages are no longer arranged, old networks no longer function, and wives come from disparate origins. Certain foods, made specially for festivals, are identified by local people as being Hakka and are still made for offerings, gifts, and family consumption. These include steamed cakes made for festivals, rice-flour balls boiled in sugar syrup made before a daughter is married, and various special dishes cooked for lineage and wedding banquets. Although these familiar foods are still made and valued, others are being added to the repertoire. The local Hakka restaurant, formerly the site of banquets, is now in danger of going out of business as people choose the more elegant, diverse, and expensive foods offered by other cuisines. Precisely specified foods are presented as part of the bride price to the families of Hakka brides, but adaptations to the requirements of others are made if the bride is not Hakka. Like other changes, this is treated in a matter-of-fact way, without regret for the loss of conformity to local tradition.

As with language and food customs, the details of ritual practice may be defined as “habitus”—learned ways of doing important things correctly—and valued, or at least followed, in a private context, but not understood or articulated in a way that makes a public statement of identity. Publicly conducted ancestor worship—the Chong Yang worship at lineage tombs, which is highly visible as the buses set off from the village with flags flying—is not markedly different from that of Cantonese lineages in the New Territories, except perhaps for the extensive participation of women and the simplicity of the paper offerings. Within the villages, however, the visible expressions of hall and domestic worship are distinctively Hakka. The single tablet in the ancestral hall was stated by some informants to be specifically Hakka. Anthropologists also have noted this difference from the local Cantonese (e.g., Blake 1981:92). Domestic worship is conspicuous by its virtual absence. While Cantonese families in the New Territories maintain and worship extensive ancestral tablets at home (e.g., Nelson 1974), Hakka ancestors are represented by soul tablets at home only in those cases in which their souls have not yet been installed in the single collective tablet in

13. About 15 percent of the wives in my 1970 census sample came from Tsuen Wan; the remainder came from widely scattered areas.
14. See Carstens (this volume) and Bourdieu (1977).
the ancestral hall. Very few Kwan Mun Hau homes had ancestral tablets in the late 1960s. The rule generally followed is that a soul cannot be incorporated into the hall tablet while there are senior members of the family still living. At the ceremony held shortly after the death of a senior person, those souls that are waiting can be incorporated into the hall tablet with him or her. The ceremony, conducted by a Hakka priest, involves carrying temporary tablets, with their incense pots, to the ancestral hall, and passing tablets and their incense pots over a red cloth to the main altar, where the incense ashes are added to those in the main hall incense pot.

The single tablet is the focal point of each ancestral hall, in contrast to Cantonese halls, with their many rows of individual tablets, representing the souls of those lineage members wealthy or genealogically important enough to have had tablets installed on their behalf. Each Hakka tablet that I have seen has the following inscription, sometimes supplemented with an additional character on each side: “The spirit place of the ancestral deceased father and deceased mother of the — descent group hall.” The tablet stands behind a small incense pot on the altar that is flush against the back wall, under which is an earth-god shrine. In front of the altar is a table, decorated with an embroidered cloth on special occasions, where the incense pot is placed and where there are lamps and other fittings. It is here that offerings and flowers, as well as incense and candles, are placed on special occasions. A knowledgeable senior member of the Yau lineage, Yau Chung-fan, explained several important aspects of the tablet’s meaning as follows:

Its real meaning is the founder’s soul, but its secondary meaning is for all the people of the Yau lineage who have passed the age of sixty. . . . The main purpose of the tablet is to represent the founder; remembering the rest is only secondary. This is the easiest method to remember the others. It is too complicated to have other tablets in the hall. This is the main difference between Hakka and Cantonese. The Hakka’s are almost the same as theirs, but simpler.

People attributed this characteristic of simplicity to themselves in various contexts: simpler foods, simpler rituals and offerings, simpler good wishes on special occasions. They do not organize ceremonies of purification every ten years, for example, nor do they make offer-
In Hakka lineages ancestor worship other than tomb worship has a single focus, the ancestral hall, and home worship is both rare and temporary. This corresponds to Myron Cohen’s description of Hakka ancestor worship in Taiwan, which also has a single focus, the collective tablet(s) in the compound hall (1969:170–74). In Kwan Mun Hau, ancestors’ identities are merged in the context of hall worship, and their birth and death days are not formally recognized. Hall worship is characterized by unity, clarity of focus, and inclusiveness. The emphasis is on the founder, the first person to open the place, and on the merged but acknowledged identities of all those who followed him (see also Aijmer 1967:57). Their individual identities are recognized in the genealogy, but not the hall. In contrast, for Cantonese people in the New Territories ancestor worship normally has two focal points, the hall and the home, and so it has an individualized aspect as well as a collective one. Its hierarchical and selective nature is also significant, in that only the wealthy and important receive hall worship, and oldest sons would, in theory at least, have responsibility for worshiping home tablets.

The practice of hall and tomb worship of ancestors in Kwan Mun Hau appears to be different from that of local Cantonese lineages in that women participate, although comparisons should be made with caution because most research on Cantonese people has been done in large single-lineage villages. Women began to participate after the Second World War, according to one informant. At most major festivals they can be seen carrying offerings to the ancestral halls, and they join in the Chong Yang tomb worship, although they play a secondary role and also do most of the heavy work. Men take charge at New Year and during wedding rituals, and they also have sole responsibility for the conduct of lineage affairs, including the management of lineage property. In contrast to the Christian women of Shung Him Tong, Kwan Mun Hau women, despite the importance of their former economic role, do not have the right to speak publicly in formal lineage or village contexts.

15. C. Fred Blake says that Hakka people in the Sai Hung region of Hong Kong also favor simplicity in the worship of gods, and are critical of the ritual expenditures of Chaozhou people (1981:103), who come from eastern Guangdong and speak a dialect related to Fujianese.

The practice of ancestor worship in Kwan Mun Hau has continued despite urbanization, and in fact has been reinforced by the increasing values of the ancestral trusts. A minority of Tsuen Wan lineages are Christian and they minimize hall ritual and conduct tomb worship differently. In Kwan Mun Hau carrying out the worship properly—following traditions that have been learned and whose practice may be beneficial to the dead and the living—seems to be a source of comfort and pride. People who are not lineage members may be invited to participate in the banquets that follow, and having the means to carry out these affairs, and also weddings and funerals, properly and well, must be a source of satisfaction. Unlike the Hakka cemetery of Shung Him Tong, however, they do not seem to be used to assert the legitimacy, worthiness, or identity of the group. Visitors are not taken to the ancestral hall and shown it as a statement of legitimacy. It is maintained because lineage members have inherited an obligation to do so, as they also inherited the ancestor’s property.

CONCLUSIONS

Those aspects of the lives of Tsuen Wan villagers that remain distintcively Hakka, particularly their language and the practice of ancestor worship, have been maintained in a situation where it has not been necessary to do so. In addition to the people’s strongly felt obligation to worship their ancestors, they still use their language among themselves, although this may not continue into the next generation. These practices can be seen as private and shared symbols of common identity, but not as public assertions of Hakka distinctiveness. They normally are expressed only within a private context, not when Hakka interact with others, and so cannot be seen as maintaining ethnic boundaries. 17

The people of Tsuen Wan seem to accept being Hakka, and the practices that help to express this, as one aspect of their multifaceted identity. This includes, most importantly, the fact that they are Chinese, 18 but also their identification with their locality, as New Territories natives and Tsuen Wan people. The fact that the Hakka aspect of their identity is becoming increasingly limited and situation-specific in its

17. Important theoretical statements on ethnic-group interaction and boundary maintenance are found in Barth (1969).
18. Barbara Ward (1965) presents a clear and thought-provoking analysis of Kau Sai fishing people’s sense of their identity in relation to other Chinese people.

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expression and visibility does not seem to be perceived as a problem. Until now they have participated very little in the movement to research Hakka history and extol the accomplishments of earlier Hakka people. Their energies, instead, have gone into increasing and preserving knowledge of their own lineages. The Yau lineage has added to its genealogy through contact with related groups in China, and has twice printed revisions for all its member families. Maintaining their villages and tombs and defending them against the incursions of urban development have also been ongoing concerns (Hayes 1991). They have felt little need to draw on their Hakka identity as a platform for social or political action because their lineages, villages, and regional ties provide them with a strong base.

As Howard Martin demonstrates, however, circumstances can change and cultural differences can become the basis for politically self-aware action groups. Various changes are taking place in Hong Kong that may affect Tsuen Wan people’s sense of their own identity. One is a growing interest in Hong Kong local history, fostered by the government’s allocation of resources to create museums and designate historic sites. Although the Sam Tung Uk Museum was created with little local input, people are at least aware of its existence. One young man told me he goes there from time to time to look around; an older man said he wouldn’t go “because I know all about Hakka things!” Still, it is a publicly visible expression of the history of the Hakka people of Tsuen Wan, much-visited by other Hong Kong people. In the last few years one local leader has organized the public singing of Hakka mountain songs during the Tian Hou Festival, an event that apparently is enthusiastically attended, although the singers have to be brought from the more rural area of Sai Kung. The development of local history museums in Hong Kong is paralleled by a growing academic interest in Hakka history and culture. The First International Conference on Hakkaology was held in 1992 at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, and a number of such conferences have been held recently in the People’s Republic of China, where research on this subject is being supported for the first time in forty years. The attention given to these events in the media may help to increase the interest of local Hakka people in their own language, history, and culture.

The political situation of Hong Kong is also changing, and the future is uncertain, to say the least. This uncertainty may be one reason why

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19. James Hayes states that over half of the fifty Tsuen Wan lineages have genealogies, and that twelve more had them until the Second World War (1983:117).
people seem to be showing increasing interest in Hong Kong's distinctive local history and culture, knowing that they may soon be threatened. The rights—or, some would say, privileges—of the indigenous people have been, and continue to be, questioned (Graham E. Johnson 1977), and after 1997, when Hong Kong becomes part of China once again, there may be less tolerance for the system that has supported their special status. Certainly China for several decades after 1949 did not demonstrate support for lineages and their property, but in the years since the open-door policy was implemented in 1978 there has been increasing tolerance that is reflected in the rebuilding of halls and tombs, especially in areas with Hong Kong and overseas Chinese connections (see Woon 1989). If it were to happen that indigenous status no longer gave New Territories people a power base, they might, as Howard Martin (this volume) suggests, turn to their Hakka identity as another basis for organization. Although one would predict that being Hakka would continue to become increasingly irrelevant in contemporary Hong Kong, new circumstances may result in another change in the lives of Tsuen Wan people.

20. See also, for example, an article in the *South China Morning Post*, weekend of January 2–3, 1993, headed “NT Villagers Cash in with Secret Deals.”