

## The Image of Women in Taiwan Hakka Literature

Wai Fong Cheang

Professor, Center for General Education,

Chang Gung University, Taiwan

### Abstract

Despite its fictive nature, literature has always had an immense influence on our conceptualization of reality and various aspects of society, including ethnic minority cultures. Hakka culture in Taiwan, just like many other ethnic cultures around the world, expresses and shapes itself through literary productions. This paper discusses the works of three Hakka writers in Taiwan, Chung Chao-cheng, Chung Li-ho and Wu Cho-Liu. It focuses on their representation of the images of women to examine the controversial ethnic minorities stereotyping and the possible cultural empowerment in these Hakka writers' images of women.

**Keywords:** Taiwan Hakka culture, Chung Chao-cheng, Chung Li-ho, Wu Cho-Liu, women

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“What is Hakka literature?” Tu Kuo-Ch’ing asks in the forward to an issue on Taiwan Literature and Hakka Culture in *Taiwan Literature: English Translation Series*, after which he answers:

If Hakka literature means no more than literary works written by a Hakka writer, it does not mean much, because among the four elements of literature—author, reader, language used for expression, and literary world presented—the first three are not essential conditions; the most important is the world and the spiritual features presented in a work, such that distinctive features of Hakka culture are presented. (xxiii)

Though this emphasis on the distinctiveness of Hakka culture as an essential constituent of Hakka literature sounds reasonable, it inevitably reflects a self-conscious dimension marked by a fear of the lack of identity, a fear inherent

in most minorities striving for recognition. Nevertheless, this paper would like to argue that this self-conscious dimension should be abandoned, while all the three other elements, author, reader, language, which Tu terms “not essential conditions,” should also be included in our understanding of Hakka literature.

Hakka as an ethnicity has long stridden across national boundaries due to diaspora, that is, migration and scattering from ancestral homeland. Hakka, which literary means “guest people,” signifies this diaspora that has already rendered Hakka as an ethnic group pluralistic in many aspects of culture. Basically, ethnicity is one of the “putatively elemental bases of human life” that is like the nation, “rooted presumably in shared blood, culture and corporate interest” (Camaroff and Camaroff 49). Not unlike many other ethnicities or the nation itself, which, as Benedict Anderson famously proclaims, is “an imagined political community” (6), Hakka is sustained by imagination. Literature, despite variation in form and themes, is an artistic expression of the imagination. It is a corollary of imagination and a stimulant of imagination. The literature of an ethnic group or a nation is the agent through which its members or non-members imagine the ethnic group or nation.

It is noteworthy that William Shakespeare, icon of English literature, is most well known for his play *Hamlet*. Set in Denmark, *Hamlet* is about the plight of the prince of Denmark. It does not depict any distinctive English feature. In fact, England is only mentioned as the usurper king’s agent to have Hamlet killed. Many other famous Shakespeare plays, such as the *Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Twelfth Night*, to name just a few, are not unlike Hamlet. They are “set in foreign realms” with foreigner characters (Levin and Watkins 207). In spite of their want of distinctive English culture, these plays are proudly celebrated as emblems of English literature.

Thus seen, all of the three conditions, namely, author, reader, language, which Tu considers to be of no importance, are critical to Shakespeare’s fame. The fact that Shakespeare is an English playwright well received by his English audience, and the fact that his plays are written in English definitely have more weight than the truth that most of his plays have little to do with the presentation of distinctive English culture. Shakespeare is even praised as the father of modern English as the popularity of his plays has made his language influential.

Literature, in fact, does not necessarily need to mirror reality. It is well known that Aristotle, who defends poets against Plato's rejection of them from his ideal republic, proclaims that poetic works may be removed from reality yet they approximate the essence of truth. In other words, literature may be fictional, imaginative, far removed from earthly truth. Thus seen, Hakka literature may be as fictional, as imaginative, as far removed from reality as any other kinds of literature. If a Hakka writer produces a science fiction set in outer space, can that work be counted as Hakka literature? When one flips through the pages of an anthology of English literature, one would definitely find science fiction writers such as H. G. Wells and George Orwell, whose works are not only highly fictional, but also irrelevant to the presentation of distinctive English culture or English spirit. A science fiction by a Hakka writer may not reflect Hakka culture or culture history. It may be without any distinctiveness. Yet as long as it is by a Hakka author, as long as it has used language successfully regardless of whether in Hakka or other languages, and regardless of whether it represents any distinctive Hakka culture or Hakka spirit, it should not be excluded from the category of Hakka literature.

Actually, out of the four elements of literature that Tu has mentioned, I consider reader to be the most essential. A literary work, Hakka literature or world literature, label or no label, would only survive the test of time if it appeals to readers. Without readers, a literature does not exist. Hence, Hakka literature should lose its self-consciousness and self-imposed limits. It should not be confined to works that represent distinctive Hakka culture or Hakka spirit only. Hakka literature should be more inclusive.

It is commonly known that T. S. Eliot, a Nobel laureate, was born in the United States, but moved to England and renounced his American citizenship. Interestingly, it is said that an anonymous author wrote during Eliot's time, "The best English poetry being written today...is being written by Americans" (Dvivedi 11). Instead of being excluded from American literature, T. S. Eliot has been proudly included. In fact, he is anthologized in both American and English literature. The inclusiveness of both American and English literature is a useful strategy that empowers both their cultures. By the same token, when we asks "What is Hakka literature?", instead of setting limits and drawing up boundaries

to exclude certain works, I believe we should be more inclusive as inclusiveness would empower Hakka literature and Hakka culture.

Hakka literature in Taiwan, just like many other kinds of literature in the world, is not just a reflection of the culture or history contextualizing it. By integrating imagination and social-cultural influences, Hakka literary productions express themselves and shape themselves. Literature, as a cultural production, is influenced by culture, and has influence on culture, especially when it has strong appeal to a large number of readers.

The works of Chung Chao-cheng, Chung Li-ho and Wu Cho-Liu, three Hakka writers in Taiwan, belong to the group of writers who constitute great cultural influence. They are not only popular among common readers, but have been anthologized in Taiwan literature. This paper discusses the works of these three Hakka writers by focusing on their representation of the images of women. It aims to examine the controversial ethnic minorities stereotyping and the possible cultural empowerment in these Hakka writers' images of women.

Wu's short story "The Doctor's Mother" (Hsin Sen Ma 先生媽)<sup>1</sup> depicts the miserable conflict between a Taiwanese mother and her Taiwanese son during the Japanese colonization period. Their main conflict arises from the great difference between the mother's resistance against Japanese colonial power, and the son's earnest support of the policies put forth by Japanese rulers. While the mother adheres to traditional Taiwanese practices and values, especially to the importance of helping the poor, the son seeks recognition from Japanese rulers, and is too stingy to give alms to the poor. The mother can be classified into a determined woman as her is adamant with her standpoints. Yet instead of being dominant and influential within the family, she is marginalized.

In Taiwanese society, medical doctors have always had high prestige because medicine is a profitable trade unaffected by economy and politics. Moreover, doctors are commonly believed to be intellectuals, whose high education and professional ethics have given them high moral standard. A doctor's mother is usually a respectable title as her son's professional achievement is considered the mother's success in her education of her offspring. Wu's story, however,

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<sup>1</sup> This English title and all quotations from the original story are my translation from the Chinese text.

presents a mother who is not proud of her doctor son at all.

The beginning of the story explicates the differences between the mother and the son. Accompanied by her maid, the doctor's mother walks out of the back garden, while an old beggar is waiting outside for her to give alms. The beggar knows that on the fifteenth day of the month, just as it has always been for the past decade, the doctor's mother goes to temple to offer her worship. He seizes the chance to beg for her sympathy. Just as usual, after hearing the beggar's plea, she turns sympathetic and orders her maid to give him two dos (unit) of rice. The maid is hesitant, while the doctor's mother says, "There is nothing to fear. Is Hsin-fa not my son? This is a small thing. Don't be afraid of him. Just get it quickly" (22). The story flashes back to what happened once when the maid went inside to get rice for the beggar. The doctor reprimanded her and asked her to get instead of one do, just one son (another smaller unit). When she got back to the doctor's mother, the latter was angry. She borrowed the beggar's staff, rushed inside the house, and beat her son. She reprimanded him:

Hsin-fa, your lease from field is 3,000 si (unit) strong, but you are unwilling to give one do of rice to a beggar. You look down on the poor. If a county governor or an official is here, you make a big fuss to prepare wine and meat to treat them disregarding the cost. You have turned yourself into a walking dog, not a man. (Wu 23)

The term "walking dog" ("Tso go") is a demeaning term in Chinese as it compares a man to a dog willing to run errands for devils.

After the initial introduction of the mother-son conflict, the story supplies us with more information about the son, Dr. Chian Hsin-fa. "Chian" in Chinese means "money," "Hsin" means "new," and "fa" means "rich." This name means "newly rich." Chian is a medical doctor who loves to wear his doctor's uniform. His treatment techniques are rather common but he is famous because he tries to win popularity by being kind to his patients. Yet he is a phony, a fake both in attitude and intention (Wu 23). He is only kind to others because he wants to have a good name. He intends to use the good name to make money. Within fourteen to fifteen years, he has made enough to buy fields with a lease value of 3,000 si strong. He is originally from a poor family with a laborer father and a mother, who weaves hats day and night. They scraped all their money together to

put their son through medical education. After the son graduated, he married a woman from a rich family, and his wife's brothers helped him to set up a private hospital. In his medical practice, he knows how to talk to his patients to win their hearts, and he urges his patients to use expensive medicines.

What Chian cares most about is his saving account. The increase in numbers increases his happiness, and he works harder to give injections to his patients so that he can make more profits. Eventually, he becomes one of the top riches in his community. Since he used to be poor, his frugality prompts him to stop his mother from giving alms to beggars. Yet he is generous in many aspects, such as making huge donations to concretize his name. Hence, he has won many honorary positions. He is one of the first in his community to be granted "national language family" and to change his Chinese name into Japanese.

During the Japanese colonization period, the Japanese government had many cultural and language policies that aimed to turn the colonized into royal subjects of the Japanese emperor. Japanese language is called "national language." Within a family, if all the members can speak Japanese, the family can apply to be a "national language family." The government would grant it a plate with the Japanese words "national language family" to be hung at its door to show the honor. The Japanese government also encouraged the Taiwanese to change their Chinese names into Japanese ones. In the story, Dr. Chian has applied for the recognition of a "national language family." He lies to the investigator that his mother knows a few Japanese sentences for social occasions. Yet the truth is his mother refuses to learn Japanese. He tries to persuade his mother by telling her that outstanding persons know how to adapt to the time. He proposes to have his wife teach his mother Japanese. But she replies, "That is stupid. How can a daughter-in-law teach a mother-in-law!" (Wu 26) Then he proposes to hire a schoolteacher to teach her, but she disagrees again: "You need not worry. I will not live long in this world" (Wu 26). Frustrated, Dr. Chian eventually stops persuading her.

Dr. Chian is also upset by his mother's appearance in the living room. When there is a guest to the house, no matter whom that is, his mother will appear to greet the guest. She is in Taiwanese clothing, and she speaks Taiwanese. Her voice is loud and shrill. In his eyes, her behavior is that a countrywoman. He

wishes in his heart that she would just keep quite and just go inside. The family is a “national language family” and speaking Taiwanese is prohibited. Once, he said to his mother, “Mother. There is a guest. Go to the back room quickly” (Wu 27). Angered, she replied loudly: “What foolish words! A guest is here, a guest is here. You regard me as a nail in your eyes. Go to the back. Where should I go? Is this not my home?” Her words embarrassed Dr. Chian.

Dr. Chian modifies his house into Japanese style with tatami flooring and paper door. Yet within ten days, his mother is angry again. She hates to have Japanese miso soup for breakfast, and she cannot bear to sit down on the floor. Her legs stiffen into pain and numbness. She can barely swallow her rice. So Dr. Chian has to remodel the dining room and his mother’s bedroom back into Taiwanese style again.

When Dr. Chian changes his Chinese name into Japanese, his family begins to wear Japanese style clothes. He builds a pure Japanese style house, and when it is done, he wants every family member to be in Japanese style clothing for a photo. But his mother still insists to be in Taiwanese clothing. After the photo shooting, his mother uses a kitchen knife to chop up the Japanese style clothing that has been prepared for her. She says, “If I keep this, when I am dead, I am afraid that someone will put this on me. In this, I am ashamed to see my ancestors” (Wu 28-29). This signifies her resistant attitude towards Japanese colonizers. But in her family where everyone is eager to be accepted by the Japanese government, she is inevitably lonely and marginalized. She stays in her room after dinner when the rest of the family chats in Japanese and sings Japanese songs.

The mother’s last confrontation with her son happens after her grandson gets into a fight in school with his classmate, whose father is a barber and has changed his name into a Japanese one, too. Unhappy about non-elites changing their names into Japanese, Dr. Chian has made negative comments about them. The grandson picks up his words to scold his classmate by saying that: “My father says that barbers are low class” (Wu 32). The barber’s wife goes to the doctor’s mother to tell on the grandson. The doctor’s mother reprimands his son for allowing the grandson to call a barber low class. She tells her son to his face that his father was once a coolie and he also worked as a palanquin-bearer. She asks if a barber is low class, what is a palanquin-bearer? This last confrontation reveals

her sympathy for the poor people. She has never forgotten what her family used to be before her son becomes a doctor.

Not long after the confrontation, the doctor's mother gets sick. Even in her sickness, she remembers that it is the fifteenth of the month and she orders her maid to give the beggar some money. Pleading to see her in person, the beggar is brought secretly into her room. When they meet, she tells him she desires to eat long fry dough, a traditional Taiwanese food. She has asked her son to buy it for her in vain. The beggar fulfills her wish the next day. She eats the long fry dough happily, after which she says she was happier when she was poor, because even though she is rich now, her son is useless. The beggar sympathizes with her. After the beggar is gone, she summons her son and tells him that he should not hire a Japanese monk after she dies, as she does not know Japanese. Yet after she passes away, her son still hires a Japanese monk for her funeral regardless of her wish.

Wu's story elaborates the mother's helplessness and melancholy vis-à-vis influential Japanese assimilation policies. The realization that her son, though a successful medical doctor, is in fact a "walking dog" yearning to be recognized by Japanese colonizers grieves her. The mother-son conflict is not just a generation gap issue. It spotlights the inevitable struggle between the resistant colonized Taiwanese people, who resent Japanese rulers, and social climbers who are willing to trade their original Taiwanese identity. The time backdrop is crucial in the story—the Japanese colonization period is a dark period for Taiwanese. Dr. Chian's earnestness in changing his Chinese name into a Japanese one is depicted with a strong ironic tone. At first he believes that the new Japanese name is a great honor, but after more and more people follow suit, he begins to feel that the low social status of many of those that changed their names has diluted his honor. The doctor's application for the honor of "national language family," that is, a family with all of its members being able to speak Japanese, is strongly ridiculed as his mother resists learning Japanese. She keeps speaking Taiwanese with a loud shrill voice.

Like many prototypical mother figures in literature, the heroine in Wu's story props up the values of the family and the original culture while male members are being lured away by enemies. Her sympathy for the poor and laborers on the

land reinforces her image as a mother of the land. The beggar, who honors her after she has passed away, represents the common people on the land who are deprived because of Japanese colonization. As a mother figure honored by the beggar, the heroine becomes a symbol of resistant Taiwanese spirit. Though her son has lost himself in the assimilation policies of the Japanese, the heroine stays resistant till the end of her life.

Chung Li-ho's short story "A Poor Couple"<sup>2</sup> portrays a Hakka wife, who works hard to support her family when her husband is sick. The first person narrator is the husband who keeps revealing his grief for not being able to give his wife a better life. At the beginning of the story, he returns home after three years of absence due to his hospitalization. His medical cost has impoverished him, while his wife has worked to support the family in his absence. The narrator recalls the hard-won love between his wife Ping-mei and him. They have married in spite of strong disapproval from their families and society. The disapproval was caused by the fact that they both have the same surname. A marriage between those of the same surname is a prohibition in old Taiwanese society. After their fight against strong disapproval, all they wish is a quiet life till their heads grow white together. But then due to sickness, the narrator husband has to leave his wife and child to get medical treatment elsewhere. When he reunites with his wife and child, tears roll down her cheeks, while the child, a four-year old boy, keeps quiet because he does not know his father. The narrator holds his wife's hand and finds it thin and scared; on the palm there is thick skin. He knows she has had a hard life. But she tells him that it really doesn't matter. She says as long as he is cured, everything is well.

After the narrator gets home, he discovers that during his absence, his wife has learned how to farm their rice fields. She even takes up extra work for other farmers and for the forest bureau when she has finished working her own fields. On the day of his return, she is hired to clear land for a temple. Though she has to labor hard, she never complains but wears a smile instead.

The narrator soon understands how busy his wife is. After finishing hard labor outside of the home, she gets back quickly to cook for the family. Wishing to

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<sup>2</sup> This English title and all quotations from the original story are my translation from the Chinese text.

lessen her burden, the narrator starts to help out. Gradually, he learns how to cook, how to do dishes, clean up the house, feed pigs, sew and take care of children. The only thing he has not learned well is doing laundry. So eventually, they trade their positions and duties. The wife works outside of the home while the narrator husband works inside, as if she is a good husband and he a good wife. This reversal of traditional gender roles cannot be considered typical Hakka culture. It is a necessary practice due to the husband's sickness.

The whole story revolves around Ping-mei's sacrifice while facing the family's financial difficulty, and the narrator's feelings of gratitude and grief. He comments that even though they do not have materialistic enjoyment in their lives, their true hearts and loyalty towards each other give them great happiness and contentment (Chung L.H. 112). When Ping-mei tells the narrator that she will go wood poaching, the narrator writes that, "My heart is painful as if pricked by a needle" (Chung L.H. 113). Even though he says that they can have thinner porridge, he understands that they cannot survive even with that. They have kids and kids would need tuition. Besides this, he has medical cost. Therefore, even though he is unwilling, she still begins wood poaching. When he sees her off with a group of poachers, he is terribly sad. By the end of the day, Ping-mei gets back home from the backdoor. Soaking wet in sweat from head to toe, she gives him a smile. But the heavy wood on her shoulder distorts the smile, and it makes her look fierce. The narrator wants to cry out loud. But instead, he turns his head away so that he would not see her. He is afraid to ask any question. This detailed description of Ping-mei's looks and the complicated feelings inside the narrator's heart gives the story an appealing sense of helplessness. As a husband, the narrator is most unwilling to have his wife work as a wood poacher. He hates himself and he pities his wife. Most important of all, there is a deep fear in his heart because of the danger this job involves.

The climax of the story depicts the narrator witnessing wood poachers being chased by forest patrols. Anxious for his wife, he runs after them even though it is already dark. There are several persons running into a small river to escape the patrols. A woman falls down in the river, while her chasers rush at her. In fear, the narrator believes that woman is his wife, and she is caught. Yet when he gets back home, he finds her there on a stool. He holds her hands and kisses

them, while his heart burns. He says he saw her caught by forest patrols, but she denies. Yet her bruises and wounds reveal the truth. Eventually, she admits that she has fallen down in the river. The narrator can longer hold his tears while he remembers how for more than ten years, they have always been “two souls fighting against great odds, and since one has fallen, the other continues to fight alone. How can Ping-mei survive this difficult situation? Poor Ping-mei!” (Chung L.H. 119) This appealing description of the husband’s feelings for Ping-mei renders the hard labor of the heroine worthwhile.

By the end of the story, the husband narrator has finally found a way to balance his debt to his wife. He acquires a job as a copywriter for a movie theatre. His small income allows Ping-mei to stop her dangerous job. Yet that is just half of the solution to the family’s problem as the narrator husband’s sickness is still a danger to the family.

This weak husband and strong wife plot contributes to the commonplace notion that Hakka writers’ works proliferate with images of strong Hakka women. However, not all Hakka women by Hakka writers are as strong as Chung Li-he’s Ping-mei.

In Chung Chao-cheng’s *Taiwanese Trilogy*,<sup>3</sup> there are strong Hakka women and weak ones as well. This fiction, set in a time from pre-Japanese colonization through the very end of the Japanese rule of Taiwan, covers three major plots with a wide variety of different heroes and heroines. The first part centers on a Lu family’s sadness when they first hear about Qing Dynasty’s cession of Taiwan to Japan, and it describes their heroic engagement in Taiwanese people’s fight against Japanese colonizers when the latter first arrived. The second part focuses on a young man from the Lu family, who leads protests against Japanese government. He is determined to help Taiwanese farmers exploited by Japanese rulers. The third part depicts the escape of a young Lu family member from Japanese police after he, as a student, has participated in anti-Japanese government activities in Tokyo. Since the trilogy is an epic in scope, it includes many female characters.

In the first part of *Taiwanese Trilogy*, there are three remarkable Hakka

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<sup>3</sup> This English title and all quotations from the original story are my translation from the Chinese text.

female characters, Tao-mei, Fung-chun and Chiu-ju, all of whom are young women of marriageable age. Loyal in her love, Tao-mei, who works as a tea leave picker, finally acquires the love of the man she admires. She is the comic element in the story. Fung-chun, the Lu family's daughter, is in love with a laborer. After pre-marital sex with the laborer, she is pregnant and has contemplated suicide. Luckily, she finally marries her love. She can be considered a tragic comic element in the story. The woman who represents the tragic is Chiu-ju. Her stepfather wishes to sell her to a brothel. Her mother is a constant victim of the stepfather's home violence. She is in love with a young man from the Lu family, but during his absence for a war against the Japanese colonizers, another man from the Lu family rapes her. At her love's return, her low-esteem and feelings of worthlessness make her ashamed to meet him. She eventually commits suicide by drowning herself.

In the second part of the story, there are two female heroines. One is a Japanese woman in love with the hero, a young man from the Lu family. In spite of objection from her family, her love is strong. She is supportive towards the hero even though she knows that he will be in trouble for his determination to seek justice for Taiwanese farmers. Another heroine is a Hakka woman named Yu-yuan. As an adopted daughter of the Lu family, Yu-yuan will be the wife for one of the sons of the Lu family according to Hakka custom. The mother has planned for the hero to marry her, but the Japanese woman attracts the hero's heart. Not unlike her Japanese rival, Yu-yuan is also supportive towards the hero's resistant activities though she knows what kind of danger awaits him. She continues to be a great help in the family by looking after the hero's mother, cooking and doing household chores with patience and kindness. Finally, her kindness and love win her the hero's heart.

In the third part of Taiwanese trilogy, there is a strong Hakka woman, Bun-mei, whose physical strength attracts the hero Lu Tsi-tsiang. Before meeting her in person, he has already heard her voice echoing through mountains. While working in the wilderness gathering Yue-tao leaves, which the Japanese government requires, Bun-mei practices giving commands loudly. This young woman has been appointed a commander for the youth troop organized by the Japanese, which has to gather on a monthly basis to practice. In physical strength

and survival skills, Bun-mei excels the hero. Yet she admires him for his learning. She has only an education equivalent to primary education, while he has higher education in Tokyo. The two gradually fall in love and get married though she knows he is a fugitive, who might be caught and imprisoned, or even executed by Japanese government. In fact, she admires him for his resistance against Japanese rulers.

Bun-mei represents the native Hakka daughter of the land, physically strong, determined and supportive towards her love in spite of great obstacles. Yet she also has a very soft spot in her heart, as shown in her lament for a little girl in the neighborhood who dies from sickness. The story is a romantic comedy centering on how Bun-mei and Tsi-tsiang meet, fall in love, clear up misunderstanding, overcome obstacles, and are finally united. The backdrop of the story, the wilderness of the mountains, symbolizes truthful human nature. Though Japanese colonial power attempts to penetrate this wilderness, the Taiwanese on the mountains at their own risk protect the hero from the Japanese. The hero even befriends an aboriginal youth who teaches him how to fish. Their friendship signifies the harmonious relationship between different ethnic groups in Taiwan. Bun-mei, who knows how dangerous it is to be in love with a fugitive, still chooses to marry him and bear him a baby. Beyond the shadow of a doubt, she represents the image of strong Hakka woman who tries her best to overcome difficulties.

In the works of the three Hakka writers we have discussed, there are strong Hakka women but there are also weak ones. Despite her strong will and her resentment against the Japanese colonizers, the doctor's mother in Wu Cho-Liu's short story, dies in melancholy because of her son's earnestness in being a "walking dog." It is hard to define whether she is a strong or a weak woman. The narrator's wife Ping-mei in Chung Li-ho's story is hard working and supportive towards her husband and her family. Yet the image of her smile being distorted by the heavy weight of wood on her shoulder, and the pitiful sight of bruises and cuts on her body from her fall foregrounds her fragility. Though Chung Chao-cheng creates several remarkable Hakka women, who are strong and determined, such as Bun-mei in the third part of *Taiwanese Trilogy*, he also portrays helpless women, such as Chiu-ju, who takes her own life after being

raped, and Chiu-ju's mother, who never resists the home violence her husband inflicts upon her.

It is generally believed that Hakka literature proliferates with images of strong women. In reality, without the fictional world, "Hakka women have a reputation for working extremely hard" (Nicole Constable 109). They are "objectified as a symbol of Hakka identity, an embodiment of Hakka qualities" (Constable 119). This stereotype, I believe, is not a distinctive marker of Hakka literature as many other literatures are also laden with images of hard-working or strong women. Homer's *Odyssey*, a prominent ancient Greek literature, for instance, depicts Penelope, Odysseus's wife, protecting her family in her husband's long absence from home. Margaret Mitchel's *Gone with the Wind* written in the twentieth century is another example. It has Scarlet O'Hara capable of hard work when poverty strikes during the American civil war.

Within the fictional world of literature, many women are portrayed as capable of being strong and hard working. When we look beyond these female characters to the setting of the story, we see the fact that their toughness and resilience are usually the result of poverty and the absence of male help. Hence, the strong female characters are just doing what they have to do, just like the weak female characters are doing what they believe they have to do.

The strong female characters created by Hakka writers are indeed remarkable. They might be a reflection of reality, or a mixture of imagination and wishful thinking. In view of its nature, Hakka literature is not dissimilar to other kinds of literature in its reflective and imaginative interaction with reality. As discussed, there are strong female characters but there are weak female characters in Hakka writers' works. The proliferation of strong female characters, I believe, cannot be counted as a distinctive feature of Hakka literature as many other literatures share this common denominator.

What then is the distinctive feature of Hakka literature?

This is a question that never troubles me because literature is not anthropology. It does not need to focus its attention on distinguishing one group of people from another, underlining a set of distinctive features. Literature only needs to worry whether it can attract readers. No literary work can survive the test of time if it does not have readers. What can attract readers? The answer, I

argue, is the capability to appeal to the emotions as well as the intellect. Aristotle has already given us a good rationale when he discusses tragedy's influence on us—through “pity and fear” we might have purgation of emotions (16). That is an appeal to the emotions. As to literature's appeal to the intellect, the fictive elaboration of human nature invokes our thoughts and reflections.

The significance of the female characters in the above-discussed Hakka literary works lies not in their distinctive character or common denominator, but in each of their unique appeal to our emotions and intellect. We might identify with some of the female characters, we might pity some of them, and while experiencing the fictive world in these works, we reflect on our own historicity and identity, we reconsider women's gender roles, and we construct an imaginative link with them—a link that might distinguish us from them or identify us with them. These works' merit lies not in their presentation of strong Hakka women or tough Hakka spirit, but in their vivid descriptions of human feelings in expressive language that appeal to us. These works do not define Hakka. They contribute to our understanding of Hakka. They trigger our imagination of Hakka. Most important of all, they initiate our appreciation of Hakka literature.

When I first began this paper, at the back of my mind were the thought about science fictions by Hakka writers set in remote zones about creatures unrelated to Hakka people. Can they be classified as Hakka literature? Can subgenres by Hakka writers such as fantasy, thriller, detective story and martial arts fiction, which might have nothing to do with prototypal Hakka culture, be classified into Hakka literature? My answer is yes.

This answer seems to need justification. Hence, let us take into consideration what English literature is and what American literature is, and also the question, “what are the main features distinguishing English and American literature?” In reality, we have seldom seen literature scholars busy themselves with drawing up distinctive features between these two. We see these two overlap in their list of authors. Over the past few decades, we have seen them expand to include ethnic-minority literatures, such as the inclusion in the canon of American literature works by African-American and Asian-American writers. Only self-conscious ethnic minorities would worry about having a set of

distinctive features.

With 75 million Hakka population around the world,<sup>4</sup> and with Hakka talents constantly producing new works in various genres and styles, with various themes and characters, what is conceptualized as features of Hakka literature, I believe, should stay open and inclusive.

### **Works Cited**

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<sup>4</sup> According *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, the estimated number of Hakka people worldwide is 80 million. According to *Encyclopedia of World Cultures*, in 1992, the International Hakka Association estimated Hakka population worldwide to be around 75 million. The actual number is, just as Wei-An Chang declares in the Preface to *Hakka Culture, Identity and Belief*, “debatable.” (5).

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