

### **Caveat**

This narrative is a blend of many sources, some contradicting one another, and all spinning different perspectives. Even authoritative sources don't agree, and none of those of any substance are in English. Consequently the facts presented and the narrative written are my attempt at reconciling those few sources.

However I am grateful to those of you who have taken the time to forward corrections and details, especially Dr. Lau Chun-Fat of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and Him Mark Lai from the University of San Francisco. I would encourage everyone to do likewise.

### **Preliminaries**

Wars never start of themselves, and the Punti-Hakka Clan Wars are no exception.

When the Ming Dynasty was ousted in 1644 and replaced by the Q'ing (or Ch'ing) Dynasty, very few Chinese were happy about the outcome. Their Han Chinese emperor had been replaced by a foreigner, a "dog" from Manchuria.

The Ming and their supporters fled south to Guangdong Province, where many were eventually captured or killed. Some Ming loyalists retreated to the island of Taiwan in 1661, and eventually ousted the local Dutch settlers. They were led by Zheng Cheng Gong, who was known as "Koxinga" after the Ming emperor had bestowed on him the royal clan name of Zhu. The new Qing emperor, fearing that the people of the coastal region might help these rebels, issued an imperial edict ordering his subjects to move inland for fifty Li, or about 30km, which was enforced from 1662 to 1669. The rebels on Taiwan were finally "pacified" in 1683, though opposition continued for another twenty odd years.

Appeals by the viceroy and governor of Guangdong Province moved Emperor Kiangxi to allow the people to return. Less than half of the original population returned to their homes, leaving the coastal regions strategically under-populated. The emperor encouraged others to emigrate into these regions and granted them money and seed to start their lives afresh. The most significant group to take up this offer for Guangdong Province was the Hakka, meaning "guest" or "stranger", who had different customs, dress and language, and were principally from the upper reaches of the East and Han Rivers.

However Guangdong Province was already occupied by the Punti (ie. "people of the earth"), who were Han Chinese and mostly descended from the earlier settlers. The Punti therefore occupied the best lands, leaving the Hakka the less fertile and mountainous lands, and the rivers where fishing and piracy seemed to be their chief occupations. Sea robbers and pirates were a periodic source, especially in the years 1790-1810, when large piratical fleets caused wide-spread havoc in the Pearl River Delta.

The Punti were not completely displeased at the arrival of the Hakka, as they provided manpower to work their fields. This cosy

arrangement lasted for a few decades, until the Hakka began buying up land and forming their own ethnic enclaves. In Taishan County their numbers grew to about a third of the population, as did the fear of the Punti of dispossession and marginalisation, and defensiveness of the Hakka. For the time being the excesses of this tension were held in check by the strength of the central government.

The Taiping Rebellion exploded into Guangdong Province in 1851. Hong Xiu Quan (or Hung Hsiu Ch'uan), a Hakka from Hua Xian who believed he was the younger brother of Jesus Christ, founded the Bai Shangdi Jiao (or Worship God Sect). He raised an enormous army in neighbouring Guangxi Province, which swept the imperial forces both eastward and northward. Over 20 million people died throughout southern and central China before the rebels were finally defeated in 1864 by imperial forces.

In 1854 the anti-Qing Triads took advantage of the turmoil to lead insurrections in Dongguan and Hua Xian, where they were known as the Red Turbans. They set fire to Foshan, which burned for three days, but were eventually suppressed by imperial forces after two or three more years of fighting, pillaging, plundering and destruction by both sides.

As a consequence, Imperial Government control over the more distant counties was severely weakened.

### **Hostilities**

These conflicts spread throughout the region, and quickly developed into a series of wars for control of the southwest corner of the Pearl River Delta. As the rebels were mainly Hakka and the local authorities mainly Punti, the existing animosities fueled a conflict of genocidal proportions, in which the main battlefield was Taishan County.

Very quickly violence broke out in Enping and Kaiping. By 1856 fighting had spread into the south-west corner of Taishan county, and soon engulfed the entire southern regions where many Hakka had settled. In one month of that year "over 3000 people" were killed in Taishan County alone.

The Punti formed their own militias, built walled fortifications and hired mercenaries, which were funded by the merchants in Hong Kong, both European and Chinese. Remittances from sons husbands and fathers on the goldfields of California and Victoria were diverted to these war-like preparations. Villagers would destroy roads and bridges in order to keep the marauding factions away.

Some "500,000 people died", thousands of villages were destroyed, and "more than 100,000 fled" to Hong Kong, Macau, southern Guangdong, Hainan Island and other foreign parts. Much land fell into disuse, famine and disease stalked the land, people grew increasingly desperate and banditry grew rife.

On one occasion "the Hakka surrounded the town of Guanghai, about 100km west of Macao. When the starving inhabitants surrendered on a guarantee that their lives would be spared, the Hakka butchered most of them. The clan tensions in Australia are easily understood".

In other battles many of the captured Hakkas were "sold to the coolie trade" via Hong Kong and Macau. "Among them were twenty to thirty thousand Hakkas who either were sold by the Puntis or had indentured themselves to South America."

The number who died from epidemics and hunger was even higher. It is said that "in March 1864 alone, more than twenty

thousand Hakkas who were pinned down at Tailoongdong died of epidemics".

Once the threat to the Imperial Dynasty receded, the Imperial Government began to pay attention to these local genocidal wars. In 1867, imperial troops were sent to suppress all sides, which they did with ruthless and indiscriminate force. Both sides suffered severely.

### Aftermath

In order to stabilize the region, the central government followed a time-honoured strategy - separation of the combatants.

They "encouraged" the Hakka to move to Guangxi Province. Those who stayed were given their own independent sub-prefecture, Chixi (or Chikkai), which lay on the south-east coastline of Taishan County. This new department was too small and infertile to be a long-term success, and most of these Hakkas also eventually moved to Guangxi Province.

The Punti took over the territories formerly occupied by the Hakka, but remained both poor and traumatized for many many decades, which drove many to emigrate to South-East Asia, America and Australia for the sake of their families.

In 1912, after the founding of the Chinese Republic, Chixi became a county in its own right, which lasted until 1953, after the founding of the People's Republic of China, when Chixi County was reunited with Taishan County.

Today less than 3% of the population of Taishan County are Hakkas.

### Further Reading

There are only two sources I know that go into any detail about the Punti Hakka Clan Wars, and both are Ph.D theses, and one of those in Chinese script, namely:

- \* A Study of Armed Conflicts between the Punti and the Hakka in Central Kwangtung, 1856-1867 by Zheng De Lua, University of Hong Kong Thesis, Hong Kong 1989
- \* The Hakka-Punti War by J.A.G. Roberts, Oxford University Thesis, Oxford 1969

Both additional sources and corrections are sought.

### Taishan Genealogy

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Dear All,

Recently learnt that you're keen to learn the origin and impact of the war between Hakka and Punti during the mid 19th century. Here is a new book focusing on the study of the said subject that I would like to introduce to you all. I don't know if you can buy it or not. If you can, don't miss it.

Title: (The Hakka-Punti War in Guangdong, 1854-1867)  
Author: (Liu Ping) Year and place of publication: 2003, Beijing  
CK 29.10.2003 Hong Kong Author: Liu Chong Shen (---.indo.net.id) Date: 10-31-03 22:49

Hi, I would like to know why did this war happen? I've heard about this war, and who is the winner and the implications of this war?

There a hong kong mini series being made about the conflict. To my knowledge this was started by Hong Xiuquan who is a Hakka and his believe in God and Jesus Christ.

If I'm not mistaken, the actor who played Hong Xiuquan in the Hong Kong mini series was Liu Leung Wai. Hopefully someone can confirm/verify this if i'm wrong.

Author: (202.155.147.---) Date: 1108-03 21:18

The tensions between Hakka and Punti people (Cantonese, Fujianese) resulted none other than natural condition and different in languages/customs. The Hakka being a "new" comer, they didnt own land as most fertile lands already generations belonged to Punti people (Cantonese, Fujianese, etc) .

Hence, Hakkas were forced to work out rough terrains therefore most of them were poor. And most becoming workers of the farm belonging to the wealthy Puntis. Being the workers they earned very little and often cheated and bounded themselves into mountain of debts by the more wealthy landlords. In some cases, generation after generation they continued to work for the same landlord and unable to pay of their debts (a system similar to slavery).

Therefore many Hakkas, out of desperation, spurred out many rebellions and it is little wonder that many rebel leaders are Hakka like Sun Yat Sen. Sun Yat Sen and Mao Tze Tung understood their plights and wanted to get rid of the feudal/landownership system and against the corrupt Qing government.

Hence "Fan Qing Fu Ming" (down with Qing dynasty and up with Ming dynasty) which has been in mind among many southern chinese were modified by Dr. Sun with the creation of the Republic. All rebellions started from South China since it was far reached from the centre of power in the North (Beijing).

Author: Meta-4 (---.sfsu.edu) Date: 1-09-03 15:10

... wrote: The tensions between Hakka and Punti people (Cantonese, Fujianese) resulted none other than natural condition and different in languages/customs. The Hakka being a "new" comer, they didnt own land as most fertile lands already generations belonged to Punti people (Cantonese, Fujianese,etc)

I believe there were just as many poor landless Punti people as the Hakkas. Am I to assume that there were no Hakka land owners in NE Guang Dong?

Hence, Hakkas were forced to work out rough terrains therefore most of them were poor. Rough hilly terrains all over Southern China had been converted to terraced rice paddies whenever possible. Were the Hakkas able to grow rice using this method of terracing the hillside in NE Guang Dong?

And most becoming workers of the farm belonging to the wealthy Puntis. Being the workers they earned very little and often cheated an bounded themselves into mountain of debts by the more wealthy landlords. In some cases, generation after generation they continued to work for the same landlord and unable to pay of their debts (a system similar to slavery).

I believe this was the case of everyone in China at any given point in the past. The total arable land of China is ironically quite small because the West Winds have systematically carried the fertility of the land across the Pacific Ocean as a result of historical systematic negligent farming practices. Therefore, working the rough terrain is a universal experience all over China among all

poor farmers which is nothing unique to Hakkas.

If the Puntis were so wealthy, then why did so many of them have the desire to leave China over the centuries and established overseas communities? I doubt any of them brought their wealth with them when they emigrated. Realistically, would you leave all your wealth (& life of privilege) behind in China to immigrate to foreign lands where 3rd class citizens (who were at least citizens) were treated better than you?

Therefore many Hakkas, out of desperation, spurred out many rebellions and it is little wonder that many rebel leaders are Hakka like Sun Yat Sen.

There is a possibility that Sun Yat Sen is Zhongshanese and the language of Zhongshan is considered a Cantonese dialect (but the Cantonese can not understand Zhongshanese which is a dialect often mistaken as a "Hakka" dialect to the Cantonese speaker). In fact, nobody except a Zhongshanese can understand the Zhongshanese dialect. Bilingualism in other Chinese dialects is not a brand new phenomenon especially if they also reside in the same community. If Sun Yat Sen spoke Hakka in speeches it would not be any more unusual than a Hakka who can act in Cantonese or sing in Mandarin.

Sun Yat Sen had spent time in Hawaii where the Zhongshanese people are the foundation community of the Chinese establishment there. Assuming if he were Hakka, it would hypothetically have been more logical for him to have spent that time in Nan Yang (most likely Singapore) instead of Hawaii.

Sun Yat Sen and Mao Tze Tung understood their plights and wanted to get rid of the feudal/landownership system and against the corrupt Qing government.

Historically, almost every succeeding government/dynasty of China came to power because of grievances against the corruption of the prior government. But for a community which periodically produces political leaders/(revolutionaries) brings forth different historical interpretation as a community having a never-ending obsession of power hunger. Apparently, the people most oppressed by the central government are most likely those who thirst the most for power and are willing to spill blood in order to get it. (One of the greatest threat to the government is social instability and it intrigues me as to why trouble makers don't understand why they are so oppressed.)

Is it not ironic that Mao's Communist Party rise to power was because of the "corruption" of Sun's KMT Party? And is it not ironic that the Communist Party today has evolved exactly into all the qualities they wanted to eliminate from the KMT? Has anyone kept track of how many heads are rolling as a result of the on-going party crackdown?

There is a saying: The more things change ...the more they stay the same.

Meta-4 Author: Nanyang Ke (---.tm.net.my) Date: 1-10-03 01:38 <http://www.apex.net.au/~jgk/taishan/phcwar.html>

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### **Teochiew 'Na' or Nai' Surname**

Author: Albert Lam Date: 10/01/00:12

There are some Teochiew-speaking people who use the surname 'Na' or 'Nai'. It is the surname 'Lam' or 'Lan' (Mandarin) (blue). There are sometimes known as Teochiew Khek. Their ancestry is likely Hakka. The surname 'Lam' is over 160 generations. It is one of the earliest, if not the earliest, surname in China. The number of 'Lam' is rather limited both in numbers as

well as in areas. In China, it is confined mainly to Fuliau, Dapu county in Kwang-tung. But, I was surprised to learn that the mother of the official 1.3 billion child born in Beijing last year is a 'Lan' (blue). There are also many 'Lam' in Taiwan, among them a well-known TV hostess and a few Legislative Assemblywomen. In Malaysia, many cloth merchants in Batu Pahat are 'Lam'. Many pawn shops operators in Singapore are also 'Lam'. I would like to know if there is any 'Lam (blue) whose ancestors are from outside Dapu in Kwangtung. Cantonese 'Lam' is actually 'Lin' or 'Lim' (forest or woods).

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### **The durian tree behind our village house**

Author: CHUNGYoon Ngan Date: 02-03-06 21:25

The durian tree behind our village house Can you recognize some of these tropical fruit?

Is durian there? <http://yn.chung.id.au/TropicalFruit.jpg>

Believe it not I don't eat durian. If you have read the history of my family you will know why I don't eat durian.

Our family had a durian tree behind our village house near the toilet. It was, and still is, according to my childhood friend, a huge tree. It bore hundreds of durians every season. Ermei, my grandma, never sold them for money, but gave them free to the village folks. To her it was a good way to create harmony and good relationship and at the same time she hoped that they would buy grocery stuffs from her son's grocery shop.

During the durian season her grandchildren, including me, ate too much durian and they all became sick. Grandma was angry and she forbade us to eat durian anymore. Since then her grandchildren stopped eating durian.

There was a Hakka woman in our village and her husband's name was Cai Tianqi. One day, she went for a wedding feast and had taken some wine. It was during the durian season and my grandma had given her family a few durians. When Mrs Cai returned home and saw the durians she had a few seeds (durian flesh). The next morning she was found dead. There was a believe in the village that when wine and durian flesh mixed together it became poisonous stuff.

Grandma felt guilty over the death of Mrs. Cai. Since then she stopped giving free durian to any family in the village. But she would pile up the durians in her son's (Guanlin) grocery shop to be taken free by anyone who wanted them. Those who wanted durians could also request through her son to reserve a few for them.

Mr. and Mrs. Cai had a son called Cai Yonghe. In the 1950s he was employed by Guanlin (Ermei's son) as a kepala (the title of a foreman or the head of the workers), in his tin mine. One of his eyes was blind and he was a very smart kepala. I worked under him when I completed my secondary education and before I came to Australia to further my study.