

# **Our Temple, Our Past: Memories of the Past and Social Identity of A Hakka Community in Sarawak**

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores the impact of the forced relocation of a Chinese Hakka village community on its social identity. The relocation into a “New Village” on the outskirts of Kuching was an official policy to counter communist insurgency in Sarawak in the 1960s. Their original dwellings are now abandoned but the temple remains. The community still returns to the temple as a place of worship and reverence. It has become an entity that draws the community together, and back to their village of origin. The link and identify with the past are negotiated through the presence of the temple. It is the temple and its symbolic significance that the community seeks affiliation to rather than to their ancestral village in China from which their forefathers had come. It has become a direct link to their rich historical past to which the community clings on to proudly.

This paper examines the reasons behind the role of the temple as an important unifying factor in community solidarity and preservation of historical continuity of the community. The discussion will focus on the action of the government and its social impact on their physical relocation and their spiritual “relocation” of their social past to a temple which stands as a testament to their beginning. Between the phenomenal action of relocation and the transcendental throwback to the past, the community seeks to preserve its links to its history and shared experiences in the old settlement and to remind itself of the painful process of being forced to relocate.

**Key words:** Relocation, community identity, shared memories, spiritual solidarity (continuity/escape)

## **Introduction**

According to Smith (1986: 49), many ethnic groups derive a sense of identity and shared destiny from deep cultural, historical and territorial roots. DeBernandi (2006) in his study on popular religion in Penang noted that Malaysian Chinese claimed a separate identity through the construction of temples. This study examines how a temple may continue to crystallize the sense of identity of a community that has been physically removed from it. This is a study of a village and its people and temple. A Hakka community had settled down and developed a site on the outskirts of Kuching, the capital of Sarawak, in a spontaneous process of agricultural

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pioneering. They chose this site as areas nearer the town had already been occupied by early Chinese settlers belonging to other dialect groups. The early settlers had built the Tai Pak Kung (大伯公 or Da Bo Gong in Mandarin)<sup>1</sup> temple dedicated to the worship of the local tutelary deity. “Tai Pak Kung” literally means the Great Paternal Granduncle. It is situated along a road that once connected the town of Serian with Kuching.

The settlers were compelled to abandon their homes and to resettle in another site in the 1960s in an official move to combat communist threat. This new settlement occupies a compact area within a strictly monitored enclosure to insulate the inhabitants from communist activists. Socially, the community was once seen to be marginalized and resettled in an area not of its choice. However, it is still maintaining its distinct identities and religious beliefs that have been practised in the old village. Its borders had taken on political and administrative significance in the initial period of resettlement as they effectively prevented the free movements of people into and out of the village. Today, a new trunk road, upgraded into a dual carriageway in 2007, has replaced the old road and bypasses the temple. The community which once built this temple was forcefully moved to another site situated 4km away, identified as New Village in this study. The old temple remains in the “Old Village”, still well maintained by the villagers with the aid of an appointed caretaker to serve their spiritual needs. Despite its physical seclusion, the Tai Pak Kung temple in the old village site draws the community out of its spatial confines to extend its social boundary.

This study is concerned with what the temple really means to the people and will examine if it is a social representation which brings the community together to venture out of their transparent restrictions of the past; the collective memories of the past that connect the people so fondly to the temple; and whether it represents a form of the identity of the community that traces its origins as a naturally formed Hakka settlement. With these concerns in mind, the study will centre on the role and significance of the Tai Pak Kung temple that still stands in the abandoned village.

The fieldwork of this study was carried out between November 2006 and April 2008. Interviews were conducted with selected respondents of women and men. Additionally, observations through active participation in numerous activities that were organized by the community, including the Tai Pak Kung celebration, were recorded as well as the collection of data and photographic or video images for further analysis. Historical documents of the settlement were compiled at the District Office and relevant literature consulted to complete the jigsaw of chronological events surrounding the settlement.

### **The Birth of “New Village”**

The threat of clandestine Communist activities in the 1960s had compelled the government to resettle homestead Chinese farmers living between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> miles of the Kuching-Serian road (Lee, 1970:187). The farmers were mostly Hakka people



overhead. An announcement was broadcast stating that people living within a 600-acre radius along the 15<sup>th</sup> - 25<sup>th</sup> Mile along the Kuching-Serian Road to bring with them three days' supply of food and clothing and to report at 3:00pm on the third day at the nearest of the five designated camps located at the 15<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> miles.

The aim of Operation Hammer was to separate the people from the communist insurgents who were suspected to be operating actively in that area. The operation to move the people out of their houses was to be completed in 48 hours but was later extended to 72 hours, then to a week and, eventually, almost perpetually resulting in the formation of new settlements. This move by the State Government was to emulate the Malayan attempt in the late 1940s and early 1950s to insulate the Chinese from the communists. In order to set up proper villages, the Land and Survey Department and the Public Works Department began to carry out the necessary survey, including the erection of protective fences. The operation led to the creation of villages at the 17<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> miles.

The year of Operation Hammer coincided with a substantial rise in the price of pepper and good harvests. The farmers used to earn up to RM8,000 a year from pepper alone.<sup>2</sup> However, Operation Hammer led to the abandonment of the harvests by many villagers and the loss of their livestock through theft and starvation. Many farmers were impoverished and had to walk long distances to reach their farms.

August 1965-the Government began to allocate land to the settlers and all adult males were entitled to cast lots to determine location of their land. Each family was subsidized RM1,500<sup>3</sup> as start-up fund to build their houses on their own or to hire assigned contractors.

Movements of the villagers were strictly restricted. Other than going to the farm, anyone leaving the village to other places such as the town needed a permit. A curfew was imposed from 6:00pm to 6:00am. Everyone had to report to the police booth at the village each day. Those who failed to do so would be apprehended and interrogated.

The state of emergency was lifted in the 1970s. With the help of Chinese-based political parties such as the Sarawak United Peoples' Party, the people were allowed to move freely between 5:00am to 7:00pm. The livelihood of the villagers began to improve and so also the economic situation.

1974-the East Sarawak Communist guerilla group led by Bong Ki Chok signed a peace referendum with the State Government. The communists left the jungle and surrendered. This happened in all parts of Sarawak. Peace and harmony were gradually restored. This helped to improve the conditions of the three villages at 17<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> mile. The curfew time was reduced to the hours between midnight and 4:00am and restrictions on movements were trimmed.

16<sup>th</sup> August 1976-Assistant Chief Minister Tan Sri Dato Amar Sim Kheng Hong announced the end of political prohibition of the new villagers. He made the announcement at a gathering in Siburan village or 17<sup>th</sup> Mile. From then on, all villagers were free to participate in activities of any political party.

1979-Villagers from Sarikei, Engkilili who were resettled in the new villages in the locality between 1970 and 1971 were allowed to return to their original hometowns.

5<sup>th</sup> February 1980-The Chief Minister, Dato Patinggi Abdul Rahman Yakup announced the end of the state of emergency in Sarawak. The state of emergency lasted 15 years.

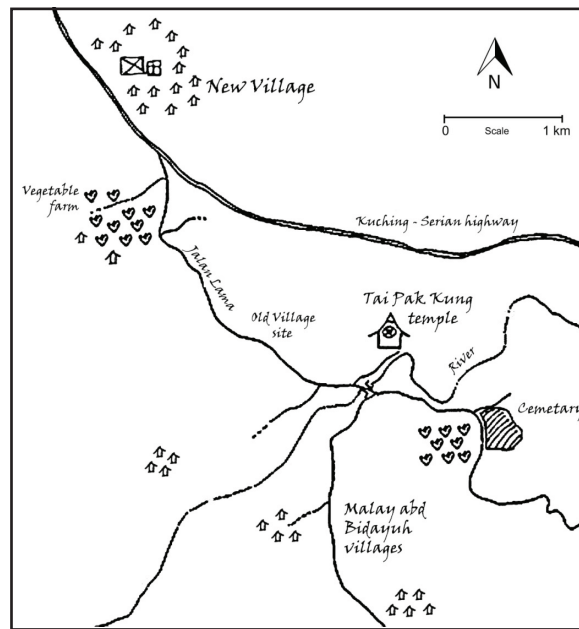


Figure 2. New Village and Tai Pak Kung Temple

Operation Hammer and the creation of New Village with its protective barriers did not effectively limit the movements or curb the activities of the communists. What it did was to hamper their operations. Many had been recruited into the party without any clear ideological

reasons. Many were also relatives of the villagers who provided food and information by means of secret coded messages hidden in the food that was smuggled out of the village. Resettlement had compelled the villagers to camouflage their movements so as to avoid being totally cut off from their relatives fighting in the jungle. They would act in the daytime rather than during the night to avoid suspicion. The imposition of curfews had given rise to a lot of difficulties in getting to the farms which was their only source of food and income. Worse still, re-location away from Old Village also severed the direct links with the Tai Pak Kung temple. This temple had been the only source of religious inspirations since the birth of the community. Being ostracized administratively by the State Government, the resettled people also faced social sanctions by the other communities at large and suffered a serious loss of morale and dignity.

### **Local Forms of Chinese Worships and Beliefs**

In general, the people of New Village describe their beliefs as “praying to the gods” or *pàishîn*(拜神). This is the common form of worship that is practised by the majority of the villagers and people in the surrounding area. Various types of temples or other structures are used for worship as well as community gathering. Temples that house different types of deities are found inside and also outside the municipal boundary of the village. Personalized structures such as altars of worship are also placed both inside and outside of homes. Some special-purpose altars are erected in construction sites, cemeteries and other places. One of the temples is dedicated to the Tai Pak Kung as an all-embracing place of worship. It is to this temple that the people of New Village gather periodically for worship and the performance of community rituals.

#### **Tai Pak Kung Temple and Its Deities**

“Tai Pak Kung” is the name given to the local Chinese deity. He is widely revered by localized Chinese communities as the patriarch god and protector of their villages. The pioneer settlers of Old Village had “invited” this deity to be their earliest deity for protection and spiritual guidance. It is sited close to another local deity, known to the local people as *Datuk Kong*. “*Datuk*” is the Malay word for grandfather and is used by the local people as a sign of respect to their tutelary deity. In terms of language, there is no difference between Tai Pak Kung and Datuk Kong. The use of the Malay term implies an infusion of indigenous flavor in the local Chinese beliefs. Datuk Kong is therefore the indigenous deity of the people of New Village. Indeed, the Datuk Kong is widely reported in many other places in Malaysia and Singapore (see also Lee, 1983; Tham, 1985; and Cheu, 1992).

Although “Tai Pak Kung” may imply the worship of a single deity, the temple itself houses three other deities (see Appendix). One of these three deities known as Tai San Shîn (or Da Shan Sheng in Mandarin) is the “Big Mountain” deity that symbolizes the natural surroundings. This

mountain deity is believed to reside at the site of the temple which stands on a hill slope and acts as a guardian of the inhabitants around that area. The Chinese believe that natural features such as mountains, trees, rivers or rocks are the abodes of guardian spirits and are not to be disturbed lest disrespect leads to untoward events. Similarly, the Tai Pak Kung deity, believed to have been brought over from China, is a localized deity. The belief in Tai Pak Kung has been assimilated into the local Chinese folk religion. Despite its widespread occurrence, the version of Tai Pak Kung deity in Old Village is now treated as a local entity that is identified with and serves the spiritual needs of the local community.

### Tai Pak Kung in Sarawak

The anniversary of Tai Pak Kung is celebrated by the Chinese in Sarawak on the second day of the second month in the Chinese lunar calendar. In the Hakka dialect, it is known as Tai Pak Kung but in Hokkien, it is Tua Pek Kong. The deity is officially known as Fuk Teck Zhen Shin (福德正神 in Mandarin), as noted by Chua (1996). The name denotes a deity of “prosperity, virtue and morality”. According to Chua, there are many gods guiding each of the five basic elements of gold, wood, water, fire and earth. Tai Pak Kung reigns supreme over all other deities and watches over the five elements. Temples dedicated to Tai Pak Kung may also be called by different names (Table 1).

Table 1. Names of Tai Pak Kung Temples in Selected Towns, Sarawak

Town	Name of Temple (in Mandarin)
Kuching	Fu Teck Si (福德祠)
Sibu	Yong An Ting (永安亭)
Miri	Da Bo Gong Miao (大伯公庙)
Bau	Da Bo Gong Miao (大伯公庙)
Marudi	Shou Shan Ting (寿山亭)
Limbang	Fu De Si (福德祠)
Lawas	Fu De Gong (福德宫)

That Tai Pak Kung is known under various names indicates difference in the explanation of the identity of the deity. It is generally accepted that the deity is the personification of someone who has contributed much to the local community. He is also attributed with special powers to heal diseases and ward off evils. Among the many myths surrounding this deity, one is associated with the period of pioneering by the early immigrants (Chua, 1996). For instance, the Kuching Fuk Teck Si was erected in memory of Lo Fang Pak, the leader of the Lang Fang *kongsi* in West Borneo. Similarly, the Da Bo Gong Miao in the former mining town of Bau was built to commemorate the Chinese *kongsi* leader, Liew Shang Pang. Both these men were known for their sacrifices and leadership and remained in the collective memory of the Chinese



as pioneers who had led their followers to a good start in life in a foreign land. Respect for these leaders was turned into worship after their death, to continue to serve the followers' spiritual needs, protection and well-being for themselves and their descendants.

### **Tai Pak Kung Temple**

The community of New Village refers to the Tai Pak Kung temple in the Old Village site as Shúi Khéu Pak Kung Miàu (水口伯公庙 or Shui Kou Bo Gong Miao in Mandarin) in the Hakka dialect. The name is a reminder of its location near a river. During the heydays of the settlement, the river was the principal means of transport for goods and people to other villages and Kuching. This scenario came to a stop at the height of communist insurgency and the temple was deserted. With the gradual restoration of peace to the area, the people resumed their visits to the temple.

In the 1990s, suggestions to move Tai Pak Kung to New Village had met with failure after consultation with the deity, through the spirit medium who went into a trance known locally as “*lok thung*” (落童). The message of the Tai Pak Kung deity was that he was not to be subjected to human request and be shifted for the convenience of the villagers. As relocation was no longer an option, the villagers decided to raise funds to renovate the temple. Fund raising is commonly carried out during the Chinese New Year when many villagers who work overseas return to New Village.

Renovation work began in 2004 with the support of the residents of New Village and those from nearby villages and Kuching. A committee of volunteers from New Village had been formed to oversee reconstruction work. This Volunteer Group supervised renovation work and operated from an office in the village and met every two months. The Volunteer Group and its members are responsible for the general administration and cleanliness of the temple as well as organizing the annual Tai Pak Kung procession and the Hungry Ghost festival.

### **Tai Pak Kung Birthday Procession**

The anniversary of the Tai Pak Kung deity is celebrated on the second day of the second lunar month. A procession is held in recognition of this special day when the deity is “invited” into the human world. This is an occasion in which the residents of New Village work as a community to continue a major religious practice and to consolidate its social coherence. The procession entails a day of activities that pools community efforts and resources in the worship of a deity. The common objective is more than parading Tai Pak Kung in New Village but also in the hope of receiving blessings and protection for the entire village. Although the history of this celebration is imprecise, the common belief among the villagers is that it has been practised for well over a century.

Preparations for the celebration begin early in the morning. The keeper of the temple, who is also a spirit medium, “communicates” with the deity through prayers and offerings on the purpose of the “invitation” to visit the village. Other members of the organizing committee and villagers who make up the congregation busy themselves with preparations for the procession.



A sedan chair or *khiàu* (轿) on which the deity is seated is attached to bamboos and is manually carried by worshippers during the procession. In traditional China, high officials such as magistrates and imperial scholars were ferried in sedan chairs. This is also the only means of conveyance befitting the status of the Tai Pak Kung deity.

The Tai Pak Kung deity who resides in the statue in the temple is invited to be seated in the *khiàu*. The statue is referred respectfully as Kim Shin (金身 or Golden Body). Two other deities that reside in the temple with Tai Pak Kung are the Ng Kwuk Sien Shi (五谷仙师) or the deity of agriculture and Vông Lo Sen Shi (黄老仙师) or the deity of virtue. Known to be Tai Pak Kung's assistants, both are also paraded during the procession. Hence, the three deities are paraded in three separate carriages with great care and amidst lot of fanfare.

The procession begins from the temple, passes by the community cemetery, and follows the main Kuching-Serian highway to New Village. The community cemetery is an important site where most of the departed ancestors of the villagers are buried. In the village, the procession meanders through the lanes and bazaar before finally heading back to the temple by a smaller feeder road.

## Chinese Religious Syncretism

### Tai Pak Kung Temple: Where Many Deities Reside

The belief in Tai Pak Kung is in accord with the tradition of Chinese religious syncretism. The Tai Pak Kung temple is generally associated with a founding pioneer, whether real or imaginary. No such pioneer has been identified to personify the Tak Pak Kung deity in the Old Village temple. Instead, the villagers believe that the deity was transplanted from China and venerated in the form of a statue. It was originally brought to Dutch East Indies where a large community of Chinese was in existence in the gold fields in West Kalimantan from the 1840s or even earlier (see Jackson, 1970; Wang, 1994). It was probably from here that the deity was brought to Old Village about 150 years ago. As with the temple, the community cemetery was also an integral feature of early Chinese settlements. The cemetery situated about 2km away is believed to be as old as the temple itself. It is the final resting place of most of the ancestors of the villagers.

The worship of Tai Pak Kung is complemented by that of Datuk Kong, the tutelary deity of the local area and therefore commonly regarded as the indigenous deity of emerging settlements in the pioneer zone. Datuk Kong is believed to be a male deity with a taste for sweetened drinks and betel nuts, and smokes the locally made cigarette or *rokok gulung*.<sup>4</sup> In prayers to Tai Pak Kung and other deities of Chinese origins, red candles and beige incense sticks are used. In contrast, white candles and black incense sticks are used when prayers are offered to the Datuk Kong. It is uncertain as to when the worship of Datuk Kong began, but almost certainly long before the existence of the temple. Based on the accounts of elderly villagers, worship of the Datuk Kong has been practiced for at least 60 years.

In the worship of Datuk Kong, the offering of pork is taboo. This has also become a practice in offerings to other deities. It is reported that the spirit medium had once uttered a half-broken message relayed through him by Datuk Kong during a trance, that pork was always visible. This incident was seen as a sign of objection by the deity, after which the villagers refrained from offering pork to Tai Pak Kung as a sign of respect to Datuk Kong. This is because the Datuk Kong altar is placed before those of other deities. However, some villagers feel that the Tai Pak Kung, being of Chinese origin, should not be denied the offering of pork. With their ingenuity for compromise, the villagers now conceal the meat in plastic bags or in baskets when they walk past the altar of Datuk Kong.

### Datuk Kong and Tai Pak Kung

The religious syncretism of the Chinese has given rise to situations in which the Tai Pak Kung and Datuk Kong are worshipped together as well as separately. The acceptance of the former's Chinese roots is as universal as that of the latter's Malay origins. Interestingly, they are often linked and worshipped together (Sakai, 1993). The Malay word "*Datuk*" is the Chinese equivalent of Tai Pak Kung. In Singapore, Sakai (1993) refers to temple for the worship of Datuk Kung as a "merger" between the Malay *Datuk* and the Chinese Da Po Gong (in Mandarin). But in Old Village, Datuk Kong exists as a separate entity and is assigned a separate altar, in the Tai Pak Kung temple. Each maintains its distinct identity, one as a Chinese pioneer deity and the other a local Malay holy being (Table 1).

Table 1. Characteristics of Tai Pak Kung and Datuk Kong

Characteristics	Tai Pak Kung	Datuk Kong
Birthday	2 <sup>nd</sup> day of the 2 <sup>nd</sup> lunar month	Not known
Origin	Brought in from China	Not known
Favourite food	Chicken, duck, pork	Local fruits, betel nut, curry, <i>rendang</i> (a spicy meat dish), <i>ikan salai</i> (smoked fish), <i>ikan panggang</i> (barbequed fish)
Favourite drink	Tea	Sweetened drinks, e.g. coca-cola, lychee
Smokes	No	<i>Rokok gulung</i> (rolled cigarettes)
Colour of candles used in worships	Red	White
Colour of incense stick used in worships	Beige	Beige and sometimes black

Generally, Tai Pak Kung is the representation of the Hakka villagers: humble, modest and kind. On the other hand, Datuk Kong wears a *songkok* (cap mostly worn by muslim male), likes betel nut, smokes local-made cigarettes, and objects to the sight of pork. In Penang, offerings of

meat to Datuk Kong may comprise of chicken and mutton but without pork or beef. Other items include cigarettes, areca nut flakes and betel leaves with lime paste (Cheu, 1992: 390).

### **Worshipping the Deities**

The Tai Pak Kung temple represents the world of religious beliefs of the community. For as long as the villagers can recall, they have embraced an eclectic system of belief that consists of worshipping deities of Chinese as well as Malay origins and the guardian deity of the natural surroundings. The Datuk Kong has nothing to do with Islam which forbids the worshipping of idols. It is in fact an indigenous deity that is widely worshipped by the Chinese wherever they have settled down. Besides their belief of the deities introduced from their ancestral villages, the Chinese are open to the idea of worshipping of Datuk Kong and the beliefs in animistic beings such as trees, rocks, mountains or other natural features. Despite the indigenous blending of different forms of deities to form a system of folk belief, the objective is always to seek spiritual protection and blessings in their new homes.

The worship of Tai Pak Kung is confined only to the Chinese even though the temple is open to all. In my field study between November 2006 and April 2008, I have not come across any non-Chinese visiting the temple such as the Bidayuh villagers who live nearby. A female informant confides that all are welcome to worship at the temple as the deity welcomes a merry atmosphere.

The villagers are convinced of the presence of spirits and deities in and surrounding the temple. It is not uncommon for the local people especially females to wear a talisman when they visit their farms or venture into the open. An informant recounts an incidence of a woman who once relieved herself in the woods and was soon badly inflicted by a disease that affected one of her legs. The villagers attributed this to the woman's failure to utter words to seek permission from the local spirit and had thus offended the spirit of the dead. Upon consulting a medium she learned that she had urinated on a Dayak tomb and was punished as a result. An Iban elderly *bomoh* (a folk healer) was consulted and advised the offer of a live chicken and *tuak* (rice wine) to placate the injured spirit. The exercise was followed by the woman's eventual recovery. From this incidence, together with the belief of the presence of the Tai San Shîn or Mountain spirit, the villagers realize the land belongs to the Dayak people. Similarly, the Tai San Shîn who rules over the spirits in the mountains may mete out punishment to any offender or to respond to calls for help by persons who are lost in the jungle. Hence the villagers are mindful of how they behave when they are in the jungle.

### **Between the Village Icon and the Temple**

In New Village, the visitor is greeted by a huge size concrete statue of a vegetable, famously known as the municipal icon of the area. Other major towns of Sarawak have their icons that make them easily recognizable. Kuching, which means a cat in the Malay language,

has cat statues; Sarikei uses the pineapple icon and in Serian, it is the durian. These symbols are meant to be powerful entities that help to identify the towns. The symbol may be portrayed in the form of an object, act, event, quality or relation that serves as a vehicle for the conception of certain meanings (Cheu, 1993). The symbol is something that stands for something else, and may embody a mythical or ritual meaning.

The key notion in placing icons in places is that they represent the identity of the communities or places. But the vegetable icon bears little significance to the life of the villagers, and does not represent their true or perceived identity. In fact, the icon reminds them of their hard life as agriculturists. The vegetable icon is a rather discreditable symbol of their lives and status. Life had been hard in the past and they do not wish to be reminded by an icon that still associates them with a life as farmers. Like all descendants of migrants, they hope that their children will lead a different life and not toil in the farm. The vegetable icon is thus not a true reflection of the aspirations of the villagers.

The Chinese treat religion as a psychological refuge when they need the help and blessings of the deities. In a monotheistic religion, help and blessings are sought from only one god. The villagers recognize more than one god. In short, what the Chinese believe in are *shen* (神 or gods in Mandarin). According to Elliot (1955: 166), a shen may be:

the souls of deceased men, usually high ranking personalities during their lives as human beings; they were able to claim a powerful position in the spirit world due to the strength of the shen component of their souls. As shen they are regarded to be capable of controlling the fate of humans and to repulse the influence of evil demons. They can be utilized by humans through the services of a tang-sin. The tang-sin acts as the medium of one or several shen with whom he has become associated, because the spirits have chosen him to be their mouthpiece.

The temple provides an avenue for the people to recollect the link to their past that traces back to their life in Old Village. It is where their past histories and collective memories reside. They wish to play down that part of the past when they were subjected to sanctions and curfews that were socially humiliating. They desire a continuity from a culture and history that they are able to identify with and be proud of. The villagers in New Village thus recognize the social continuity between their old and new settlements.

The community in New Village, having been resettled from Old Village, has retained its collective memories of the past and proudly upholds their religious heritage. Despite the reminders of resettlement and the attendant social humiliation, the villagers still cling to the fond memories of their forefathers and life in Old Village. The community has gone beyond the period of political ostracism as well as their association with their ancestral villages but rather to identify their past with the local place of origin and its temple.

The pioneer settlers in Old Village had brought with them the Tai Pak Kung deity. As

in agricultural communities in China, the deity is a symbol of the blessings for the safety and prosperity of its believers (Sakai, 1993: 6). This belief is common among the Chinese in Malaysia and Southeast Asia. The original temple was a simple structure in which the Tai Pak Kung statue was sheltered by metal sheets. At the same time, the local deity of the land or Thù Thi Kung (土地公 or Tudi Gong in Mandarin) which is also worshipped for a double assurance on the safety, peace and health of the community. As a deity that enjoys a lower status in the hierarchy of deities, the Tudi Gong occupies a crude structure showing a tablet or a piece of red paper on which is inscribed three characters to its presence. These deities have now found a permanent home in the temple to perpetuate a form of folk belief among the villagers.

While the Thù Thi Kung is the tutelary deity of the place where earlier settlers have established their homes, the Tai Pak Kung is a “universal” deity introduced from China. The Tai Pak Kung is a cultural symbol of the identity of the villagers and a throwback to the past when their forefathers settled to establish their homes and the temple. When relocated and physically removed from the temple, the villagers insisted on maintaining the spiritual links of identity and affections with the past that was embodied by the temple. With the abolition of the original settlement, the temple remains the only tangible symbol of social identity with the past.

“Identity” acts as an apparatus that supports and sustains a particular ideology (Crain and Pearson-Rounds, 2000: 23). The ideology of the community of Old Village is inseparably linked to the social and religious identities of the past. The temple and its attendant rituals and its significance as a symbol of the original site where life of the community began, brings to life a collective store of social memory of the eventful past and continues to consolidate the ideology of the community. In effect, the temple acts as a symbolic icon that integrates the village into a socially coherent community that perpetuates the veneration and memory of their forefathers and the past.

## Conclusion

The New Village community had been marginalized by enforced resettlement in 1965 in a government move to stamp out communist activities. The people were deprived free access to the temple in the old settlement where the community used to perform their religious rituals and ceremonies. This temple stands as a symbol of the origins of the community of Hakka that has survived until today. This temple, where the worship of Tai Pak Kung as the founding deity of the settlement is performed, provides the key element in the cultural and spiritual identity of the community. Adaptation to the local environment is formalized by the worship of local deities in particular the Datuk Kong.

From the inception of the settlement, religious practices in the temple have served to bind the community in unison. The worship of an eclectic mix of deities satisfies the earthly needs of the people and the need for lasting peace and security in the pursuit of a living in a new environment in the midst of various indigenous communities. The religious syncretism of the

settlement indicates the community's spontaneous accommodation of the belief in local deities. Hence the temple and the performance of rituals and festivals embrace the adoption of certain values and beliefs of local ethnic groups. More crucially, the temple has become a symbol that best represents the Hakka community in the area. Despite the distance from New Village, the temple has galvanized the Hakka community into a coherent whole, to preserve its identity and sustain its traditions and religious beliefs.

Social memories may be transmitted through oral and written narratives, or structures such as the temple. Sacred sites and rituals transmit a social memory of this community's historical roots. When the people here celebrate Tai Pak Kung's birthday, the temple rekindles the memory of community life in Old Village. Socially, continuity is still maintained between the old site and the present settlement. Resettlement as a political solution to local communist insurgency has been demoralizing to the affected families and has left a wound in the psyche of the community as a whole. Not being able to divorce itself from this episode of its history, the community seeks solace in its temple as a unifying factor in sustaining its sense of identity, cultural integrity and social recognition.

### Notes

- 1 Unless otherwise stated, vernacular terms are Romanized according to the Hakka dialect.
- 2 RM8,000 in 1965 is equivalent to RM34,423 in 2013.
- 3 RM1,500 in 1965 is equivalent to RM6,454 in 2013.
- 4 Rokok *gulong* is made from dried *nipah* leaves, curled into thin rolls, sometimes with tobacco.

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## Appendix



Plate 1. Characteristics of Tai Pak Kung and Datuk Kong  
A: The main building that houses the Tai Pak Kung deity; B: Datuk Kong and C: Tai San Shîn



Plate 2. Datuk Kong  
(note the headgear or songkok, the collared, long-sleeved shirt, and sampan or sarong.)



Plate 3. The Worship of Datuk Kong with Black Incense Sticks





Plate 4. The Tai Pak Kung Altar, with the Vông Lo Sen Shi (left) and Ng Kwuk Sien Shi (right)



Plate 5. Wearing a Talisman (arrow), for protection against dangerous spirits when venturing outside the house



Plate 6. Tai San Shîn, the Deity of the Jungle and Mountains