

***The Legend of Luo Fangbo* and the Hakka ethnic movement in Taiwan**

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To cite this article: Ying-Kit Chan (2021). *The Legend of Luo Fangbo* and the Hakka ethnic movement in Taiwan. *Malaysian Journal of Chinese Studies* 10(1): 1–14. [http://doi.org/10.6993/MJCS.202106_10\(1\).0001](http://doi.org/10.6993/MJCS.202106_10(1).0001)

To link to this article: [http://doi.org/10.6993/MJCS.202106_10\(1\).0001](http://doi.org/10.6993/MJCS.202106_10(1).0001)

Abstract

For more than three decades, Taiwan has engaged in the Hakka ethnic movement, which aims to preserve Hakka culture, identity, and language after a long period of neglect and state indifference. The Hakka ethnic movement has been marked not only by activism but also by the publications it has spawned, which promote a general, if not authoritative, understanding of the Hakka diaspora among the Hakkas in Taiwan. This article examines *The Legend of Luo Fangbo*, a historical novel ordered into existence by the state-led Hakka Affairs Council. It suggests that the novel not only helps construct a new genealogy of Hakka migrations in fulfilment of Taiwan's visions of multiculturalism and a new Hakka homeland but also infuses the new Hakka identity with masculine characteristics embodied by its eponymous hero. By extension, then, the Hakka ethnic movement, specifically the homogenisation of Hakka culture and history into a pan-Hakka consciousness, is a masculinised project that has little to say about the role of women in the Hakka diaspora.

Keywords: diaspora, Hakka ethnic movement, Lanfang Republic, Luo Fangbo, Taiwan

Introduction

As one of several recognised diasporic communities in Taiwan, the Hakka people posed a challenge to the island's sense of identity. To be sure, "Hakka" has long been a complex cultural phenomenon; the rise of ethnic consciousness among Hakka-speaking people supposedly emerged during the Ming and Qing dynasties in mainland China, attributable to ethnic conflicts that resulted from deteriorating economic conditions and increased competition for limited land and resources in the macro-regions of south-eastern China (Leong, 1997). During the late Qing period, many Hakka families relocated to Taiwan, which by then had become its own province

(prior to this, it was ruled as part of Fujian Province), encouraged in part by the Manchu court's idea of settler colonialism to pre-empt foreign designs on the island (Alsford, 2018). The Hakka and, to an even greater extent, Hokkien or Hoklo (the Hakka term of Hokkien-speaking people) grew in population at the expense of the native Austronesians (indigenous peoples), who suffered not only the loss of land and livelihood but also cultural absorption at the hands of the Chinese settlers via intermarriage and forced assimilation; The “modern” development of the island operated in a form similar to the Western and Japanese colonialisms that are now vehemently condemned by the contemporary Chinese government in Beijing (Teng, 2006). Japanese colonialism of Taiwan (1895–1945) turned the former colonisers into colonised subjects, enabling the Hakka and Hokkien to begin identifying themselves as Taiwanese (Ching, 2001; Dawley, 2019). The exodus from China to Taiwan following the Kuomintang (KMT) regime's collapse in the mainland reinforced the numerical superiority of the Hakka and Hokkien communities, which still constitute the majority of Taiwan's population today. The Hakka and Hokkien peoples are now collectively called the “native Taiwanese” or *benshengren*, as opposed to the “mainlanders” or *waishengren* who arrived from China with the KMT regime after 1945 (Yang, 2020). As the KMT regime suppressed Taiwan's local languages (i.e. Hakka, Hokkien, and aboriginal languages) in favour of Mandarin and, after democratisation, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) regime promoted the use of Hokkien (or Taiwanese, as it is increasingly known in Taiwan), spoken language has become a key identity marker. For both the KMT and DPP regimes, Hakka culture and language fall outside the purview of either Chinese or Taiwanese identity and thus “challenge the hegemony and traditional geographical limitations of the nation-state” (Wang, 2007, p. 875).

This brief overview of the formation of Hakka identity in Taiwan helps to shed light on the three branches of the Hakka ethnic movement, all on the island, after democratisation, as identified by anthropologist Howard J. Martin (1996). The traditionalists believe that the Hakka-speakers of the world are a unified whole that originated in the Chinese homeland. The moderates, on the other hand, maintain that the differences between the Hakka in Taiwan and those in mainland China are unbridgeable as a result of rule by different regimes and thus prefer a democratic Taiwan in which the rights of all ethnic groups are equal, preserved in law, and pursued in policy. The radicals endorse Taiwan's independence and the creation of “new Hakka” in Taiwan. Rejecting the traditionalist view of worldwide unity and the moderates' indecision, the radicals consider Taiwan the new Hakka homeland and Taiwan's Hakka the new Hakka; they are the key force behind the Hakka ethnic movement. That the movement is differentiated and does not derive from any local tradition suggests that Hakka history in Taiwan is “negotiable, subject to interpretation, and not wedded to particular localisms, traditions, and figures” (Martin, 1996, p. 176). Although the initial aims of (radical) Hakka activists were to include Hakka interests in the debate over Taiwan's political future and preserve Hakka culture and language against a complete assimilation with the majority

community of Hokkien and/or Mandarin speakers, they have, as we shall see, coalesced into a movement that seeks to reshape Taiwan into a global hub for Hakka studies with state support.

The Hakka ethnic movement has been characterised not only by activism but also by various publications that promote a general, if not authoritative, understanding of Hakka culture and identity. This article examines one such publication in Chinese, titled *The Legend of Luo Fangbo: Migration, Resistance, and Transformations of the Hakkas During the Age of Colonialism*. Published in 2020 and written by a team of scholars led by business professor Huang Bingxi, the book describes, in the form of a historical novel, the life of Luo Fangbo (1738–1795), who mined and prospected for gold in West Borneo and eventually founded the Lanfang Kongsì (Hokkien for “company”) or Lanfang Republic (1777–1884) in the spirit of brotherhood (Jackson, 1970, T. P. Wang, 1994). This article suggests that the book valorises—or masculinises—the qualities of Luo Fangbo and seeks to canonise him as a pioneering frontiersman of the Hakkas. By extension, the Hakka ethnic movement, which has sponsored the publication of books similar to *The Legend of Luo Fangbo*, is not merely a cultural and political endeavour; it is also a masculinised project that has little to say about women. Given that other books authorised for publication by the Hakka Affairs Council have emphasised the dissemination of Hakka culture, identity, and language and linked them specifically to Taiwan rather than to “ancestral” China (Hsu, 2010, p. 173), *The Legend of Luo Fangbo* could well be the most “masculinised” Hakka-themed book produced as part of the Hakka ethnic movement in Taiwan. Notwithstanding that the Dutch invasions of Borneo had significantly impacted its economic and political dynamics for several centuries, this article “en-genders” if not challenges conventional or historical understandings of colonialism and imperialism and critically reflects on their renderings and implications for current agendas, events, and identities in Taiwan, which, under its increasingly liberal governments, has embraced the discourse of multiculturalism that seeks to rally the so-called anti-establishment forces of ethnic and gender minorities (Wang, 2007). As the Hakka Affairs Council pushes for so-called Hakka cultural renaissance in Taiwan, *The Legend of Luo Fangbo* is expected to become an important resource for education and community development, complementing other programmes of the Hakka ethnic movement, be they administrative, cultural, or legislative. In 2010, the Legislative Yuan had passed the Hakka Basic Law, which offers a legal basis for the promotion of Hakka identity and cultural policies; the law suggests that the trend toward recognising “symbolic ethnicity” has become indubitable in contemporary Taiwan (Tanoue, 2012).

The concept of Hakka identity here takes the direction of what historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger have called “invented traditions,” or “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past” (1983, p. 1). Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983, p. 9) identified three types of invented traditions: (1) those establishing or symbolising group identities and social cohesion; (2) those establishing or legitimising hierarchies and institutions; and (3) those socialising people

into value systems. The construction of Hakka-ness vis-à-vis the history of Lanfang and the legend of Luo Fangbo primarily functions as a tool of identity building, having emerged from and been directed at Taiwanese politics. By qualifying such identity as being political, this article considers the constructivist nature of Luo Fangbo's masculinity, which masquerades as supposedly gender-neutral Hakka identity in an era of perceived gender equality and political openness.

This study comprises four main sections. It first surveys the scholarly literature on Luo Fangbo, identifies the two key arguments made about Luo Fangbo's life in Borneo, and discusses which argument was highlighted at the expense of the other during the Hakka ethnic movement. This is followed by a brief synopsis of *The Legend of Luo Fangbo* and suggests what the Hakka Affairs Council hopes to achieve with the historical novel. The third section draws on a close reading of the book to show how depictions of Luo Fangbo's masculinity are ultimately fused with notions of brotherhood, nation, and, most importantly, republic—a premier emblem of modernity. The conclusion draws similarities between the frontier exploits of Luo Fangbo and those of the Hakka settlers in premodern Taiwan and examines how contemporary Taiwanese politics may be read in the historical novel. At the very least, this study demonstrates how a literary work that combines fact and fiction might help inform the politics of cultural production in Taiwan.

Lanfang: Kongsì or Republic?

In the Chinese language, *kongsì* refers to a range of economic and social configurations that include everything from business partnerships to clan and regional associations to secret triad societies—a kind of corporation or “company” in which individuals pool economic resources and thus receive a share in the enterprise. The term came into use during the late 17th or early 18th centuries, referring to most settlements of Chinese labourers in Southeast Asia around 1700 and later for any kind of shareholding enterprise (Trocki, 1990). In these settlements, mine or plantation labourers formed partnerships with the investor, who supplied capital, provisions, tools, and transport. Given that a *kongsì* also served the political, religious, and social needs of its constituents, it was often indistinguishable from dialect associations (Yen, 1986, pp. 44–56). In short, the *kongsì* may be best understood as a self-governing community based on clan relationships, with members electing representative assemblies and a governing council akin to what we may anachronistically associate with democratic institutions and a democratic spirit (Lockard, 2013).

In 1885, Dutch colonial official and sinologist J. J. M. de Groot (1854–1921) tapped into Chinese-language annals and Dutch-language sources and published a history of the Lanfang Kongsì. De Groot's book was revisionist in that it disputed the generic claim of Dutch accounts that *kongsì* federations were unruly secret societies that required the introduction of law and order by Dutch colonial rule. For him, *kongsì* federations were efficient organisations that

operated in harmony with local Dayak communities and Malay rulers in Borneo. But by exaggerating the republican nature of Chinese settlements, de Groot did not recognise the kongsi as first and foremost an economic enterprise. One or a few family names controlled most federations, headmen could remain in office for years, and the job often passed from father to son or son-in-law (Heidhues, 1992). Nevertheless, de Groot has influenced a generation of scholars who call the kongsi of West Borneo “Chinese democracies” (Heidhues, 2003; Yuan, 2000).

Arguably the most prominent kongsi in West Borneo, the Lanfang Kongsi (or Republic), also attracted the attention of Qing-dynasty (1644–1912) Chinese literati. In the *Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms*, Wei Yuan (1794–1857) referred to Lanfang as a “nation” (*guojia*). In China’s *Eight Great Colonizers*, Liang Qichao (1873–1929), one of the most influential intellectuals in 20th-century China, called Luo Fangbo a “great man” and exhorted the Chinese nation to learn from and take pride in his accomplishments. Building on this understanding of Luo Fangbo as the founder of an overseas republic, the Hakka scholar Luo Xianglin considered Lanfang the first republic in the world. By spotting the sprouts of democracy in Lanfang, Luo Xianglin suggested that the Chinese do not owe the West their ideas of democracy, freedom, and, hence, modernity (Luo, 1961). In a recent article, geographer Tai-Chee Wong (2020) has also likened Lanfang to a republic. In contrast, business history scholars have taken their cue from historian Tian Jukang, who argued that Lanfang was merely one of many kongsi, albeit the most powerful, in West Borneo. Tian emphasised the economic nature of Lanfang operations, seeing Lanfang as an extension of prior arrangements that consolidated capital, diversified risks, and provided armed protection against perceived threats in the rural economies of south-eastern China. He thus regarded Lanfang as an “overseas Chinese company” and not as a republic in the modern sense, despite its purportedly democratic zeal (Jiang, 2014; Zeng, 2004). Although overseas Chinese companies resembled those of the British and Dutch East Indies in their objectives and means, they did not receive the support or endorsement of their “home” state (i.e. the Qing court) and were thus comprised of “merchants without empire” (Wang, 1990). In short, the parallel development of Western- and Chinese-language scholarships converged into two main streams of studies on Lanfang. One group of scholars extols Luo Fangbo for having established the first republic in Asia, if not the world, ahead of the Americans, French, and Haitians. The other group adopts Tian Jukang’s argument that Lanfang is better viewed as an economic organisation that bore greater resemblance to village oaths, which bound members to a brotherhood, and local militias of China’s Fujian and Guangdong Provinces than to the democratic states of the West. Indeed, as historian Wang Tai Peng (1994, p. 29) suggests, the spirit of democracy was reflected in the relationship of brothers (*xiongdi*) rather than in the strict rule of hierarchy: “The essence of that tradition...was that of a democratic spirit of partnership and a strong sense of brotherhood united in this calling.” Nevertheless, due to the dearth of primary sources left behind by Lanfang members, whether Lanfang constituted a kongsi of brothers, or a republic or Hakka nation comparable to the United States, remains a question (Chang & Chang, 2009).

Perhaps a more fruitful inquiry, then, is to ask what adherents of Hakka culture and speakers of the Hakka language in Taiwan have interpreted and made out of the legacies of Luo Fangbo. As self-conscious Hakkas feared that their culture and language would be absorbed or subsumed under Hokkien and Mandarin, they gained momentum in their activism and received the attention of legislators and city councillors eager to capture their votes in a democratised Taiwan (Hsiao, 2017; Hsiao et al., 2020). In response to electoral needs and a common desire for greater cultural recognition and legal protection among Hakka-speakers, the DPP government under Chen Shui-bian set up the Hakka Affairs Council in 2001 to coordinate efforts that preserve Hakka culture and language and to develop Taiwan into a centre for Hakka studies. In 2003, the satellite cable channel Hakka TV was launched. In 2010, the Hakka Basic Act was passed to secure the collective interests and rights of the Hakkas. In recent years, National Central University, National Jiaotong University (now National Yangming Jiaotong University), and National United University have set up Hakka studies institutes. The KMT government under Ma Ying-jeou inherited the Hakka Affairs Council and sought to refashion Taiwan into the world's "new Hakka capital." Over the years, the Hakka Affairs Council has revamped Hakka districts in Taiwan to attract Hakka tourists from across the world, held international conferences on Hakka studies at Taiwanese universities, and sponsored the formation of Hakka associations in Taiwan and elsewhere, in the hope that all Hakkas will acknowledge Taiwan as their new ethnic capital (Huang, 2012). The Taiwanese government and scholars alike understand that Hakka studies are crucial to producing knowledge about Hakka culture, identity, and language, and books such as *The Legend of Luo Fangbo* seek to restore a "Hakka-centred historical memory" (Hsiao & Luo, 2017, p. 81).

In the attempts by the Hakka ethnic movement in general and the Hakka Affairs Council in particular to place Luo Fangbo at the centre of global Hakka history, the Republic Discourse, rather than the Kongsí Discourse, has been highlighted. In 2005, Taiwanese writers Zhang Yonghe and Zhang Kaiyuan produced the novel *A Biography of Luo Fangbo*, which stressed that the founding of Lanfang Republic preceded that of the United States by ten years (*Liberty Times Net*, 2006). In 2007, the Hakka Affairs Council produced a Hakka opera (also) titled *The Legend of Luo Fangbo*, which glorified the establishment of Lanfang Republic and aimed at instilling pride in the Hakka diaspora. The Hakka people's diligence and perseverance were on full display; led by Luo Fangbo, they earned a position in global history as co-founders of the "first republic in the world" (Chang & Chang, 2009, pp. 61–62). In 2011, the Asia Taiwanese Hakka Association was established to strengthen Taiwan's ties with the Hakka diaspora on the continent. More recently, in December 2020, the Hakka Public Communication Foundation, sponsored by the Hakka Affairs Council, announced that it would produce an animated film on Luo Fangbo. While it called the Lanfang Republic "Asia's first republic" rather than the world's first, the Hakka Public Communication Foundation continued to regard the establishment of the Hakka "democracy" as an epochal moment in human civilization (Hakka TV, 2020). The "*historical novel*" (italics mine) *The Legend of Luo Fangbo*, to which we shall now turn, differs

from these literary productions in important aspects, even though it also highlights the democratic institutions and republican spirit of the Lanfang community. While ideas about democracy and republicanism did not exist or carry the connotations that they have since assumed, the novelists invariably refer to Luo Fangbo's kongsi as a republic in line with the Hakka ethnic movement.

A Synopsis of *The Legend of Luo Fangbo*

The Legend of Luo Fangbo differs from previous renditions of the Lanfang story because it is, as its authors suggest, history first, a novel second. A team of historians and other researchers, headed by Huang Bingxi, reviewed the scholarly literature, conducted archival and field research in West Borneo, and held an international conference based on their findings in Pontianak, Indonesia. Despite the authors' claim that their work is more historical than literary, some details of Luo Fangbo's life are embellished to develop an "imagination of historical space" (Chang, 2020, p. 17). As Hakka scholar Chang Wei'an puts it, *The Legend of Luo Fangbo* is written based on "so-called survey data" in order to "expand the imagination of many dreamers about the Hakka republic" (Chang, 2020, p. 17). This is perhaps expected, given that "a historical novel might consider the articulation of nationhood via the past, highlight the subjectivism of narratives of History, underline the importance of the realist mode of writing to notions of authenticity, question writing itself, and attack historiographical convention" (de Groot, 2010, p. 2). *The Legend of Luo Fangbo*, then, draws at least some of its appeal from the blurred divide between fact and imagination or, in other words, from the "permeability and contested status of this frontier" (Nagy, 2014, p. 9).

The opening pages of *The Legend of Luo Fangbo* reveal the objectives and process of production of the publication. The incumbent Minister of Culture Lee Yung-te, who had served as the Minister of the Hakka Affairs Council (2005–2008), decided to commission a film that depicted the "blood and tears shed by Hakka ancestors in resisting colonialism." The Hakka Affairs Council then rallied a group of Hakka-speaking scholars under Huang Bingxi to write *The Legend of Luo Fangbo*, which would be adapted for the said film. The authors sought inspiration from scholarly works such as historian Jonathan D. Spence's *Ts'ao Yin and the K'ang-hsi Emperor* (1966) and *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (1984), as well as Jack Weatherford's *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* (2004), which emphasise "human nature," "humanistic care," and "perceived historical details and images." For Huang Bingxi, "history is serious facts, [and] novels are trappings of passion." Although the relationship between history and fiction is certainly more complicated than this binary formulation, *The Legend of Luo Fangbo* is nonetheless an interesting experiment in a borderland where history is host and fiction, or history's embellishments, is guest (Wake, 2016). History plays a number of distinctly different roles in historical novels (Shaw, 1983); in *The Legend of Luo Fangbo*, history renders credibility to the tales and adventures of the eponymous hero.

The plot of *The Legend of Luo Fangbo* is fairly straightforward. The historical novel opens in 1776, with a prologue that highlights it as the year in which the Watt steam engine is commercially introduced, Adam Smith (1723–1790) publishes *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, and, perhaps most important to its grand narrative, Americans-to-be declare their independence from the British with the Pennsylvania Constitution. The description of these events helps contextualise Luo Fangbo's subsequent founding of the Lanfang Republic in global history. The events also symbolise the key themes of entrepreneurship (Watt), enterprise (Smith), and democracy (the American War of Independence). Flashbacks reveal that Luo Fangbo was forced to leave his wife and child in Jiaying Prefecture, Guangdong Province, due to poverty, which the novel alludes to as resulting from misrule by the Qing state. A failed candidate for the civil service examinations, Luo Fangbo first arrived in Borneo in 1774, so the novel, by means of narratorial strategy, begins two years after his departure from Jiaying Prefecture to coincide with the major events that would affect the course of global history. Luo Fangbo started out in Pontianak as both a teacher and a businessman. Threatened by competing Chinese clan interests, local Malay sultans, and Dutch incursions, a group of Hakka people rallied behind Luo Fangbo and hailed him as their leader. By treating his followers equally without bias or favouritism, Luo Fangbo earned the respect of both his friends and his enemies. As a democratically elected leader, he set the gold standard for anti-colonial and non-autocratic governance in the region. And with his benevolent and effective rule, he secured not only the borders of his newfound "republic" but also the frontiers of historical imagination among the Hakka people of subsequent generations.

Comprised of fourteen chapters, a postscript, and an appendix, *The Legend of Luo Fangbo* narrates the founding and formative years of the Lanfang Republic through the biography of Luo Fangbo, who, quite literally, manned himself and the republic; he took orders from no one else and ran the place himself. As the novel unfolds, the separation of Luo Fangbo and his followers from their families back in China becomes more bearable with the growth and prosperity of their newfound republic, even though they remain, we are reminded, emotionally attached to their homeland. As with all great historical epics, military conflicts and political intrigues soon plague the republic. Although Luo Fangbo manages to unite his followers, gain the support of local Dayak communities that lived with the Hakka people, fend off the attacks, and even expand his territories, the anti-colonial wars ultimately take their toll on his health. He passes away in 1795, deeply regretting that he did not get to return to his hometown. Nevertheless, democracy lives on in the republic, which elects a new leader in 1796. The thirteenth chapter serves as an epilogue; it leaps to the year 1883, when the Lanfang Republic has waned and the Dutch East Indies Company (VOC) is preparing to invade it, and ends with the Dutch annexation of the republic and, perhaps more importantly, J. J. M. de Groot's effusive praise for Luo Fangbo and the Hakka people. The fourteenth chapter is a curious, if not somewhat scattered, account of subsequent developments in the former Lanfang territories, their connection with events in China and the world, British and Dutch colonial appraisals of Hakka rule, and

the authors' evaluation of Luo Fangbo's life and legacies—he might have fallen, but he is never forgotten.

Fundamentally concerned with the delivery of historical “facts” and knowledge, the chapters of *The Legend of Luo Fangbo* are uniquely interspersed with “historical perspectives,” which provide supplementary information about characters, events, and places mentioned on the pages. Some of these “historical perspectives” are called “scholarly viewpoints,” which reinforce the authors' interpretations of colonialism, diaspora, migration, and settlement. *The Legend of Luo Fangbo* is properly footnoted, though possibly at the expense of narratorial flow, to prove its historical veracity, which suggests history's subjugation of the novel. The postscript, titled “Historical Scene,” reproduces maps, photographs, and artists' impressions, while the appendix is a report of the authors' fieldtrip to the historic sites of Luo Fangbo in West Kalimantan, Indonesia. By and large, perhaps only character emotions have been fictionalised or exaggerated in the process of making Hakka history more appealing to lay readers. *The Legend of Luo Fangbo* is more historical than legend or mythical; the “novel” historicises rather than dramatises his life, even though it does so with a tinge of romanticism.

A Pioneer Frontiersman of West Borneo

The authors of *The Legend of Luo Fangbo* sought inspiration not only from Western scholarly bestsellers such as those by Jonathan D. Spence but also from the Chinese literary tradition of “linked-chapter novels.” They make frequent references to two classics—and unmistakably masculine—novels, namely *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Water Margin*. Like the historical novels that inspired it, *The Legend of Luo Fangbo* emphasises righteous brotherhood and military fraternities against perceived injustice, malice, and trickery. The archetype of the heroic leader who rises to the occasion—against his will, as romanticised tales often tell us—in times of crisis, Luo Fangbo begins his adventures on the frontier that was Borneo, with a band of eighteen comrades in arms. In the first chapter, these men, whom Luo Fangbo calls his “brothers,” are described in vivid detail. (As individuals, however, they do not figure prominently in the rest of the novel; only Luo Fangbo is memorable.) And it is also in the first chapter that Luo Fangbo and his band of brothers, taking their cue from Liu Bei, Guan Yu, and Zhang Fei from *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, take their own oath of fraternity in a ceremony and pledge to “establish a great enterprise together in Borneo in honour of their Hakka ancestors” (Huang, 2020, p. 30). By recounting familiar tales of loyalty, righteousness, and trust from *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and creating some semblance with admirable heroes of the past, Luo Fangbo and his sworn brothers complete their fraternal rituals and set the stage for their exploits.

The authors of *The Legend of Luo Fangbo* also make explicit links between brotherhood and obligations to the Hakka ancestry. As part of their brotherhood, Luo Fangbo and his men decide that they must make offerings to their ancestral tablets and swear that they will not

forget the teachings of their forefathers (Huang, 2020). Bearing the indefatigable Hakka spirit, they found Lanfang Kongsì within six years of their oath. In their words, they succeed because “like in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, [they] become brothers with the sultan, and like in *Water Margin*, [they] are utterly devoted to one another, determined to transform this foreign land into homeland” (Huang, 2020, p. 64). As Luo Fangbo puts it, “Lanfang Kongsì is a world put together by *Romance of the Three Kingdoms and Water Margin* . . . a world where heroes come alive” (Huang, 2020, p. 65). Luo Fangbo encourages his men to follow the example of their great Hakka ancestor Wen Tianxiang 文天祥 (1236–1283), a Song-dynasty literatus who battled invading Mongol armies and became a martyr when he refused to surrender upon capture. He believes that the success of Lanfang Kongsì relies on a dual sense of ancestry and brotherhood and that the company is their “common ancestral hall” (Huang, 2020, pp. 74–75).

Lanfang Kongsì develops into Lanfang Republic, and Luo Fangbo makes an interesting distinction between “wilderness” (*jianghu*) and “kingdom.” For him, the order of wilderness is sentiment, reason, and law, whereby “good men” honour “brotherly love,” whereas the order of kingdom is law, reason, and sentiment, whereby a leader worthy of kingship possesses both a “heroic spirit” and the “demeanour of a senior official.” When asked by the sultan whether such a person exists in Chinese history, Luo Fangbo proposes the legendary kings Yao and Shun, who practised abdication and passed their throne to worthy men for their nation. Celebrating this premodern mode of democracy, Luo Fangbo believes that the people desire a leader who possesses either martial prowess or a wealth of knowledge rather than someone who merely inherits the position (Huang, 2020). He thus provides not only an interpretation of ideal power relations but also a definition of the ideal man, who embodies both the rugged masculinity of a warrior and the restrained masculinity of a scholar—the time-honoured dyad of “cultural attainment” and “martial valour” in which the cultured man was entrenched as the male ideal in imperial China (Louie, 2002). A learned man who has regrettably failed the civil service examinations (or, to put it another way, the examinations have failed him), Luo Fangbo is able to make his mark in Borneo by practising the sagely ways of wise ancient kings. He is thus superior to those who pass the examinations back in China but do not enjoy the opportunity and space to replicate the methods of ideal kingship. Always revisiting the past for inspiration and motivation, he bears in mind what historical records have said: “The Hakka people are gallant, resilient, and valiant; many Hakka men join the army, whose bravery is legendary among the Baiyue [peoples]” (Huang, 2020, p. 197).

It is in the descriptions of lengthy battles, first with local Dayak enemies and then with Dutch colonial armies, that women appear, though with limited airtime. Although Luo Fangbo continues to miss his wife and son, who remain in China, he marries a virtuous Dayak lady who, for her so-called womanly qualities of thrift, diligence, and self-sacrifice, is worthy of his love and distracts from his yearning for home. (In an early chapter, his first wife back in Jiaying Prefecture is also portrayed as a capable and understanding woman who tends to the household in his absence and tells her son not to resent his father.) In one of his battles with the Dayaks,

Luo Fangbo agrees with his newly-wed wife that war affects both men and women, albeit in different ways. Men can die as heroes, but women can only grieve for their dead sons, husbands, and fathers (Huang, 2020). In no way is Luo Fangbo's masculinity morally compromised; he happens to fall in love exclusively—and thus monogamously—with his newfound love and remains devoted, albeit only spiritually, to his native household. Only a physically wholesome (complete with husband, wife, and child) family can serve as a man's bedrock as he braves the world. Thanks to the union of a "good" settler (Luo Fangbo) and his indigenous wife, the dark and dangerous primeval forests of Borneo are (also) domesticated (Huang, 2020). By depicting Borneo as a wild frontier, *The Legend of Luo Fangbo* fulfils Luo Fangbo's masculinity and its historical expectations, awarding it a triumphant finale. Although the novel does not imply any derogatory stance towards women, the only women who appear are the wives of Luo Fangbo and his men, playing, quite literally, a supporting role in founding the republic. Coupled with the fact that it merely emphasises a particular vision of masculinity through that of Luo Fangbo, the novel should not be expected to provide a vision for women's roles because it is primarily about a male figure.

On his deathbed, Luo Fangbo nonetheless makes it clear that Lanfang Republic will not last if it remains a band of brothers. Although brotherly love has superseded narrow blood relations and helped forge a small empire, the republic, in his opinion, should become a "country in the world" (Huang, 2020, p. 227). Put in terms of contemporary vocabulary, this means that the republic has to embrace and represent peoples of different customs, ethnicities, and languages, which speaks to a key aspiration of modern-day Taiwan.

Conclusion: Reading Hakka Politics in Multicultural Taiwan

In retrospect, Luo Fangbo practised settler colonialism, characterised by self-sufficiency and the sanctity of hard work, in Borneo. He and other Hakka settlers managed to secure a degree of independence from the local sultans and Dutch colonisers. Their establishment of the Lanfang Republic was, we are told, fuelled by a strong sense of Hakka pride and belonging. By defeating and co-opting the Dayak communities, they celebrated their masculinity and fashioned themselves as legitimate possessors of Borneo lands. Like Luo Fangbo and his band of brothers, several waves of Hakka migrants travelled from south-eastern China to Taiwan's virgin soil and unexplored frontiers in the Ming and Qing dynasties. In a somewhat romantic sense, they may be considered the descendants of those frontiersmen who triumphed over natural wilderness and hostile others in Borneo or as heirs enlightened not by modernity but by reference to their ancestry and history. By canonising Luo Fangbo as a pioneer of Hakka settlers and valorising—and elevating—his masculine traits as shared Hakka ethics, *The Legend of Luo Fangbo* is a gendered novel that celebrates his transformation into a model male leader ahead of his time because of his democratic convictions.

Sociologist Lijung Wang has gainfully explained how the Hakka diaspora has integrated into what may be called a new “multicultural Taiwan” identity in citizenship and culture. The outcome of three decades of the Hakka ethnic movement, under both KMT and DPP regimes, is the inclusion of Hakka Taiwanese in the “Four Ethnic Groups”—Hokkiens, Hakkas, Mainlanders, and Taiwanese of Malayo-Polynesian descent (Taiwanese aborigines). The diasporic character of Hakkas, which is characterised by its hybrid culture and fluid identities, challenges the Multicultural Taiwan discourse, which seeks to homogenise the Hakkas on the island (Wang, 2007). Commissioned and sponsored by the Hakka Affairs Council, the publication of *The Legend of Luo Fangbo* is an attempt to mitigate the challenge. The novel may be regarded as an official, albeit literary, account of a Hakka genealogy that began first in Jiaying Prefecture and then shifted to West Borneo, with Luo Fangbo as the pioneer of Hakka settler colonialism, setting the precedent for harmonious and mutually beneficial coexistence among old and new migrants in a frontier region. The Hakka community, specifically Hakka-speaking scholars, has helped construct the new genealogy with its involvement in the Hakka ethnic movement to secure a position in the Multicultural Taiwan discourse. By claiming ownership of the Luo Fangbo experience, then, Taiwan has taken up the challenge of competing with Meizhou in the Chinese province of Guangdong as the homeland of the overseas Hakka community or even Hong Kong, where the inaugural World Hakka Conference was held in 1971, for initiating the idea of Hakka identity. The historical novel may have been one of several pseudo-official works to reaffirm the Hakkas’ sense of identity and ethnic pride, but it is a uniquely masculinised project that injects a dominant male voice into Taiwan’s pan-Hakka consciousness as the island seeks to become the new Hakka homeland. The Multicultural Taiwan discourse does not suggest an openness to women, and it remains to be seen if historical novels on their roles will be published under the auspices of the Taiwanese state to complete the design of Hakka identity on the island.

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