

*Hakka*

Scattered over most of South China are communities of Hakka. Villages of these unusual people can be found in the countryside from Sichuan to Taiwan and are especially common in the hillier parts of Guangdong, Guangxi, and Southern Fujian. The area around Meixian ('Plum County'), in the mountainous northeastern corner of Guangdong, and the adjoining counties of Jiangxi and Fujian is considered their homeland. In this remote part of South China, the Hakka outnumber all other groups. Everywhere else, they remain a distinct and recognizable minority.

The name "Hakka" is a word of Cantonese origin that literally means 'guest' or 'stranger.' The Hakka were called this when they began migrating into Yue-speaking territory, and the exotic name seems to have stuck quite simply because, until fairly recently, many Cantonese and Min mistakenly thought that the Hakka were not Chinese at all, but rather some kind of strange non-Han "barbarians" like the Tai or the Miao. In many parts of South China, these "guests" are still treated as outsiders and intruders even though everyone now concedes that they are Han Chinese.

The Hakka identify themselves as Northern Chinese, and this contention has some basis in fact. Local genealogies and other historical records indicate that many of the ancestors of the Hakka were people originally from the Northern Plains who in a series of waves migrated deeper and

## HAKKA CONSONANTS

	Denti-		Retro-	Alveo-		Post-	
	Labial	labial	Dental	flex	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Voiceless stop	p		t			k	
Aspirated stop	p'		t'			k'	
Voiced stop			ts				
Voiceless affricate			ts'				
Aspirated affricate							
Voiced affricate							
Voiceless fricative		f	s				h
Voiced fricative		v					
Nasal	m		n		(ny)	ng	
Voiceless nasal							
Lateral			l				
Voiceless lateral							
Flap or trill							
Voiceless flap							
Semivowels					y		

deeper into the South. What remains to be explored, however, are the contributions made by local populations to the formation of the Hakka people, and how these differed from those that made up the Yue or the Min. For no matter what the ethnic origin of the Hakka, the group is *linguistically* Southern Chinese. The Hakka dialects are historically allied to the other Southern dialects around them. They have some unmistakably Northern features, but they are actually not much more like Mandarin than Cantonese is. The Hakka dialects were formed in the South—almost surely in northeastern Guangdong—and the present widespread distribution of their speakers is the result of large-scale migrations that took place out of Meixian during the Qing dynasty.

Middle Chinese voiced consonants became aspirated consonants in Hakka. This historical development is often considered to be the most important characteristic of the dialect group. Since the Gan dialects of Jiangxi—just to the north of the Hakka-speaking area—underwent the same change, many linguists used to group Gan and Hakka together as Gan-Hakka. But since there are no other good reasons for this grouping, it has now generally been abandoned. Gan and Hakka are nowadays usually classified separately.

	<i>Middle Chinese</i> (7th century)	<i>Hakka</i>	<i>Peking</i>
'level'	b-	p'in <sup>2</sup>	p'ing <sup>2</sup> (p'ing)
'white'	b-	p'ak <sup>8</sup>	pai <sup>2</sup> (bái)
'lift'	d-	t'i <sup>2</sup>	t'i <sup>2</sup> (tí)
'younger brother'	d-	t'i <sup>4</sup>	t'i <sup>4</sup> (dì)
'flag'	g-	k'i <sup>2</sup>	ch'yi <sup>2</sup> (qí)
'together'	g-	k'iung <sup>5</sup>	kung <sup>5</sup> (gòng)

The dialect spoken around Meixian is considered to be standard Hakka.

It has seventeen initial consonants (see chart). The nasal *ny-*, which is articulated with the blade of the tongue against the palate, occurs only before the vowel *i*; e.g., *nyit* 'sun,' *nyiet* 'moon.' It does not contrast with the velar nasal *ng-*, which never occurs before *i*, and so the two can be regarded as the same phoneme even though they are pronounced very differently. The initial *v-* developed historically from \**w-*, and some linguists still treat it as a semivowel.

There are six vowels in Hakka: *i*, *ə*, *e*, *a*, *o*, *u*. After the initial consonants *ts-*, *tʂ-*, and *s-*, the vowel *ə* is pronounced like the buzzing minimal vowel heard in Mandarin *sì* 'four,' for example. But, unlike this similar-sounding Mandarin vowel, the Hakka vowel contrasts with *i*; e.g., *səi* 'to think,' *sí* 'west.' As in other Southern dialects, *m* and *ng* sometimes function as vowels.

S. ROBERT RAMSEY

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# The Languages of China

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