

Short Memory and Long History: Remembering Ancestors of Hakka Community in Ayutthaya, Thailand

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Abstract:

A group of middle-aged Hakka Chinese in Ayutthaya started to try to reconstruct their memory of their ancestors from the late 1990s. There is a saying that ancestor worship is one of the characteristics of Hakka people. Those Hakka Chinese had actually lost the channel to the ancestors after their parents passed away. Some have sent their children to China to learn Mandarin or Hakka, and some have given a Chinese name for their spouses, such as Ah-Mei, a typical Hakka name. At the same time, Ayutthaya, the Siamese capital before Bangkok, is full of Chinese relics and legends: it was founded by Chinese merchants in 1350, was the main destination in Siam for the tribute envoy from China, and was the place where the king with Chinese blood defeated the enemy in 1767. The historic memory became a hidden history from the 1940s, when the assimilation policy was adopted. So this group of people have two different kinds of resources to rebuild their past. The actions of these Hakka people, who have been quite assimilated into the local community for generations, still adopt a Chinese way to reconstruct the memory of their ancestors. This paper will examine how ethnic Hakka Chinese in Ayutthaya who joined the Hakka association have reconstructed their past and are commemorating their ancestors.

Keyword: Historical Anthropology, Social Memory, Hakka, Ayutthaya

Introduction

History is constructed by a process of cultural practice in which different memories are selected for articulation. The recent emergence of group activities from the Hakka community in Ayutthaya, Thailand, shows this nature. Hakka people, a sub-ethnic group among ethnic Chinese, was a hidden group in Thailand for decades after Thailand adopted an assimilation policy towards Chinese people from 1932. Adopting local culture and language, the majority of Hakka people lost the ancestor's language as well as the memory of cultural practice. But in the past decade, associations of Hakka people in remote towns have revived, including Ayutthaya, where Chinese people have long historical records associated with this ancient city.

The purpose of this paper is to study how the Hakka community in Ayutthaya have created the cultural practice to construct their past. It focuses on two major kinds of history --the migration history of the Hakka people, who mainly migrated to Thailand in the late Nineteenth Century, and the maritime history of Chinese people. Both involve cultural practices such as ancestor worship and religious activity of consecrated gods. The rapidly changing situation of ethnic Chinese should be taken into account both in Ayutthaya and in Thailand as a whole. The central theme of this study is to apply the approach of historical anthropology to the effort of reconstructing history in this small community.

The study of memory and historical anthropology

The study of social memory was originally from Maurice Halbwachs who wrote the first academic book on this topic in the 1920s (Halbwachs, 1925). He developed the idea of collective memory, illustrating the nature of collectiveness of memory in different environments such as the family, religious group, social class, etc. Halbwachs developed what was useful for studying memory and discarded what was popular but not convincing in the explanation of how humans remember by studying personal psychic situations in Europe at that time. To understand how to remember the past, we should consider how to remember by social context of relevant matter. So the social relations of memory would be an important part of the whole process of constructing memory. That is to say, social relations, such as in a community, religion, political organization, or social class, could build a part of the whole process of constructing memory.

In such a process of constructing memory, how collective memory is moulded can be influenced by power relations. A regime can use a calendar, public ceremony, mass media or the educational system to shape the way of memory through state apparatus. By strengthening and changing historical memory, a regime can control society, make the foundation for the unification of a nation, build up authority, or reproduce social relations. So the research on how the past is relative to the present, and how should history is stated in some particular manner, can help us understand that history is seen in a particular location. The study of history can be relocated in the study of historicity, historical consciousness, historical imagination, and historical representation.

We should not only emphasis social relations but also neglect the cultural aspect of rebuilding the past. The Anthropological research on reconstructing memory can

help us to recognize the importance of cultural systems and value systems. The way of constructing the past, or keeping memory, is shaped by basic cultural ideas. Furthermore, culture is a set of meaningful symbol systems which constructed people's idea of history. History is often structured by cultural system.

The development of historical anthropology was based on a combination of internal theoretical developments in anthropology and the changed situation of human societies. Anthropological study of Chinese society often faced challenges from both sides. Morris Freeman applied kinship in his research on Chinese society in South China and Southeast Asia. It is easy to see the Chinese society as a stagnated society. William Skinner used a Chinese model to see the elite society among the ethnic Chinese in Thailand. He saw the trend of change among the Chinese society, concluded that the change would be a one-way process which would lead to assimilation. However, the evidence from interview responses and related materials did not clearly reflect the one-way change among the Chinese society in Thailand. The way of those Sino-Thai to keep or create their memories should that the change is not one-way direction in their everyday practices even under the assimilation policy in Thailand.

Ayutthaya

Ayutthaya was the Capital of the Thai dynasty before the Bangkok period. From 1350 to 1767, Ayutthaya had a wealthy history as it was the center for trade and cultural activities. It has the longest history as a Capital city in Thai history. Western historians therefore call this period of Thai history the Ayutthaya period. Chinese people were also full of memories about ethnic Chinese in the country. The city was

built by Chinese merchants in the fourteen century, led by Uton in 1351. In Chinese documents, there is a long history about Ayutthaya. It was called ' Dacheng ' in the Chinese language, which literally means “the big city”. The first business area where Chinese people lived was called “milk road” in Chinese records. The Thai king who had Chinese blood defeated the long-term enemy Burmese in this city. The city can therefore be seen as the focus of Chinese memory in Thai history.

The ancient city was abandoned as it was destroyed in the war between the Burmese and Siamese. The Capital of Thailand then changed to Tonbury and then to Bangkok. The new imperial court moved the capital to Bangkok in 1782. The spotlight has moved away from Ayutthaya since then. The population in Ayutthaya is less than 100,000 today. Now the city is listed an the World Cultural Heritage of Unesco.

The city was rebuilt as a small town in the late nineteenth century. It became a small station along the railway from Bangkok to the North after the water routine was not important anymore. A small group of ethnic Chinese earned their living and migrated to Ayutthaya in the early twentieth century. It is just an ordinary situation for Chinese people to search new places to live. The small towns along the road from Bangkok to Chingmai had some small communities.

Ethnic Chinese in Thailand

From my field work, I traced the migration history among the Hakka community. The people migrated to Santo first and lived there for few years. In Santo, the Chiu Chew people were the dominant group. Many Hakka people learn the language during that time. When they arrived in Bangkok, once again they live in the Chiu Chew dominated society. It is why the people hide their identity and appear as Chiu Chew

people. For generations, Hakka people did not show their sense of being Hakka. Some family lost their memory of ancestors.

According to Chinese historical records, Chinese people migrated to Thailand since the Sui Dynasty (581-618). The problem is that at the time of the Sui Dynasty, Thailand did not exist yet. The earliest Thai dynasty was recorded as Sukhothai, which existed in 1238-1419. At the same time, we are not sure what kind of people migrated to present day Thailand from China. The dynasty in China might only have controlled Northern China before the twelfth century when its Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279) moved Southward. It is difficult to tell whether people who lived in Yunnan or other Sino-Thai frontiers were Han Chinese. Tai speakers in China today are still in large numbers, including Zhuang, the biggest minority group in China. So the "history" of the early contact between China and Thailand is actually in doubt.

The massive migrants to Siam took place in late Ming and Ching Dynasty. Particularly in the late Nineteenth Century, the ethnic Chinese who lived in the Southern coastal area came to Siam to earn their living. The treaties with foreign powers requested that China open its harbors for trade and shipping. Many ethnic Chinese then came to Siam through harbors like Santou, Xiamen, Haikou, Canton or Hong Kong. Most people arrived in Bangkok by sea, but some arrived in Chiang Mai over land. According to estimates from different resources, the number of ethnic Chinese in Thailand was about 4,400,000 altogether, or about 9% of the total population in Thailand.

At the beginning of the 19th century, about 7,000 Chinese reached Thailand every year. About 15,000 people migrated to Thailand from China every year between the

1880s to the First World War. The number of ethnic Chinese who entered Thailand reduced to some extent for a time between 1918 and 1927. But the number of immigrants from China increased sharply again after the Second World War. More than 260,000 people immigrated to Thailand between only 1946 to 1949, about 60,000 people every year.

Siam was renamed Thailand in 1949 but the Chinese people have had a clear idea of Siam since the fourteenth century. Thailand was seen as a Buddhism kingdom from the Chinese point of view. For many ethnic Chinese who came from Southern China, the religious environment in Thailand was not very different from China. From the beginning of migration from China to Thailand, ethnic Chinese males married local women. Among the Chinese, those who could behave like other Thai people and be accepted as local were seen as successful men. In the 1950s, the Thai government started to set regulations to limit immigration from China. In the 1970s, the Thai government accepted Chinese migrants from Hong Kong and Taiwan. Another source of Chinese migrants was from Cambodia. It is widely believed that refugees from Cambodia contain a great proportion of ethnic Chinese. Some records showed that Chinese constituted over sixty percentage. Ethnic Chinese comprised more than twenty five thousand people among the forty thousands Cambodian refugees who arrived in Thailand from 1975 to 1983. So it is difficult to describe the general situation of ethnic Chinese in Thailand. Thailand established the diplomatic relations with the PRC in 1975.

There are no accurate records of the number of the population of ethnic Chinese in Thailand. At the end of World War II, the Chinese newspapers in Thailand tried to evaluate the figure and concluded that there were about three million ethnic Chinese

in the country. Since then there has been no statistical information about the population of ethnic Chinese. There is a common opinion that Thailand is number one or two in terms of the number of population of overseas Chinese.

In general the ethnic Chinese of Thailand are seen as a whole. There is little information about their ethnic origin. Ethnic Chinese whose background is Chiu Chew (Chaozhou) were seen the biggest group, being more than 60% of all Sino-Chinese. The same source shows that the people who came from Fujian, Hainan and Canton, about 10% for each group. The Hakka people which we will discuss later were not mentioned.

The Hakka in Ayuthaya

We selected Ayutthaya to do our field study because it has a long history of Chinese in Thailand in terms of written historical records in classical Chinese. The focus area is the old street in Hwaro Market and Chao Phrom Market, where the Chinese people are concentrated. The most interesting thing is that the shops in those markets were mainly run by Hakka people. In our interviews we mainly asked about their family history, life history, their ancestor worship, religious belief etc. We mainly concentrated on two big families, the Wen and Liang family.

Both families migrated to Thailand from Guangdong in the 1920s and the 1930s. The first generation of migrants arrived in Sathorn, a sandy beach in Bangkok, by ship. They then took the ship on Chao Phraya River to go to Ayutthaya, one hundred kilometers from Bangkok. They left Southern China in order to escape from the civil war between Kuomintang and the Communist Party. At that time, many Chinese

people brought one-way tickets to Thailand for their future. Many people came here to do laboring jobs first. The people from Southern China followed a similar way to Thailand from the Nineteenth Century to the Twentieth Century. The trend to migrate to Thailand stopped before the Second World War.

Today transportation on land has replaced the water routine from Bangkok to Ayutthaya. It takes two to three hours by train. Ayutthaya is described in history as the island on Chao Phraya River. The urban area is still around the water routine along this island on the river. The railway station was called "Cetouse" by Chiu Chew people. Other business areas were Chao Phrom Market on the opposite bank and Huaro Market on the other side of the island.

The urban area in Ayutthaya has already shifted from old areas to Naresuan street as a new street. The shops along the Naresuan are mainly owned by the Hakka people. The Liang and Wen family are the main families in this area. There are several gold shops and clothes shops. The gold shops are mainly owned by the Liang family and the clothes shops are owned by the Wen Family.

Family history

It worth introducing a brief family history of these two families because it shows that their migration to Thailand were actually less than one hundred years. The Wen family actually came from Mei County in Guangdong province in China, which is also the central area for Hakka people. The first person who came to Thailand was Wen Chao Wen. He run a clothes shop in Ayutthaya. Since then the family run business for clothes. The Wen family owns two clothing shops, whose names are "

Weinan" and " Jinnan", and there are three generations of Wen in the town.

One member of the first generation is still alive: Wen Kai Huo, born in 1930. He arrived in Thailand when he was eighteen years old after graduation from high school. His father had previously come to Ayutthaya to work as a laborer and then returned to his hometown. Then he suggested his son come to Thailand. He followed the waterway and come to Siam in order to earn his livelihood. It took seven days from China to Siam by ship at the time he arrived. The reason to come to Ayutthaya is his brother in law, Wen Chao Wen, was here. He came to work in the dressmaker's shop of a relative first. After he had learned the skills, he opened his own shop. Now the same kind of business is run by three generations of the family.

He had no opportunity to go back to Mei County to visit his family again until he was 52 years old. After China was controlled by the Communist Party in 1949, Thailand suspended diplomatic relations with China. So there was no chance to go back to his hometown to marry a wife as he planned. He then married a Chiu Chew woman in Thailand. Recently he has become active in establishing the association of Hakka in Ayutthaya. As the first generation of migrant, Wen Kaihou has more cultural resources of Hakka. He has become one of the core persons in the Hakka associaton.

Wen's nieces also have their own shops, Both in Chao Phrom Market. The clothes shops in Ayutthaya have gone through the transformation from hand-made clothes to the industry of ready-made clothes. The Wen family has therefore run clothes shops for over seventy years and went through three generations.

Another family is the Liang family, who came to Ayutthaya from Nankou county in Guangdong. Liang Yuyuan was the first, who came to Thailand to escape the chaotic political situation in China. At the time of Liang Yuyuan's leaving from China, some warlord controlled the area in which he lived. His property was seized by some military people and so he ran away to Siam to seek a new life. After arriving in Ayutthaya, he soon developed his own business selling gold.

The Liang family has had four generations since then. The family tradition still only accepts marriage only within Hakka group. In a more accurate way, the family only accepted Hakka women for their patrilineal family. This tradition was not related to for blood clearance but for inheritance of the family business. According to a member of the Liang family, the gold business in Thailand has a very strong link within the Hakka group. The second generation of the Liang family had ten children. Nine of these ten are now running gold businesses. Some also operate other businesses at the same time, for example, a Hotel or Chinese porcelain antiques etc.

Remembering the past

Although Chinese historical records show that ethnic Chinese appeared in Ayutthaya from the fourteenth Century. The memory of ethnic Chinese is short. If we take the two families as example, both families failed to get any records before the 1930s. They have different ways to remember their past. Wen Kaihou in establishment and activity of the association of the Hakkas of Dacheng in recent years, teach one's own descendants how to practise and sing Hakkas' children's folk rhymes or folk rhyme too. The Liang family has sent their children to go to China to learn Mandarin. Both join the Hakka communities and are active in the association of Hakka.

The long-term memory of Chinese migrants has relied on the temple of Cheng Ho. Cheng Ho was a eunuch in early Ming Dynasty who became a great navigator in the Fifteenth Century. And He led an unprecedentedly huge fleet, travel to the West seven times. The fifth year of Yongle (1407), when he travelled to the West for the second time, the fleet entered the gulf of Siam in September. The record of the Chinese arrival can be seen Ayutthaya. It might be true and accurate in term of historical record.

But the memory of Cheng Ho was kept in the mythology about Cheng Ho. Those legends create the sense of memory. At that time in the fifteenth century, Siam was very bleak and desolate. There are a lot of people who are good at magic. Cheng Ho just went ashore, they came to look Cheng Ho for fighting by magic. The way to fight is that both sides had to build a Buddhist temple. The first person to achieve this goal would win the fighting. Eventually, Cheng Ho won the fighting. This was the origin of the San Pao temple in Ayutthaya.

Hidden Ethnic Group

Here we will summarize the category of Hakka in Thailand. They have been seen as a hidden ethnic group as many Hakka people often hid their identity as Hakka. They pretended to be Chiu Chew people, the main group of Chinese in Thailand. The majority of ethnic Chinese came from the area of Chiu Chew and spoke the language of Chiu Chew. Here the relationship between Hakka and Chiu Chew among Chinese in Thailand will be discussed.

Chiu Chew is today's Chaozhou-Shantou region in China. It is located in the eastern part of Guangdong province. This area actually has two major language systems,

Chiu Chew and Hakka language, with many varieties. Many Chinese people call them dialects, but they belong to different language systems from a Linguistics' point of view. The Chiu Chew language is distributed in the plain area mainly. Hakka is distributed in the mountain area mainly. Chiu Chew is one of the oldest Chinese languages. The history of Hakka might be shorter than Chiu Chew, but both belong to Sino-Tibetan family.

The distribution of both languages in Southern China is not clear cut between the conjunctive area. People speak both languages in place such as Jieyang. The language of Hakka here is closer to Chiu Chew in pronunciation and vocabulary. It is different from the Hakka in Mei County, which is seen the central area for Hakka people. The people who live in this area were called Half-Hakka (banshanke) as mentioned above. In recent years, the situation of high-speed economic growth has made Mandarin popular in the region of Chaozhou-Shantou.

Conclusion

Thailand's long historical record indicated that Chinese have been present in Thailand for a long time. The famous historical books on maritime history " Yingyai senlan (by Ma Huan) and Sinjie senlan (by Fei Sin) clearly referred to on Sino-Thai people. Chinese people can soon changed to Thai people historically. In 1536 a book about maritime history and myth, Haiyu, literally meant "the language of ocean", also had such records: "There are no surname among Thai people before, Chinese people who settle in Thailand could only keep surname for their two generations. Then their children will lose their surname." In general, Ethnic Chinese lost their Chinese identity in three generations.

In Ayutthaya, the Chinese were the people who built up this city. So the record can be traced back to early history. “(In Ayutthaya) there is a “Milk Road” where Chinese people lived mainly.” Today, the road is still in the same place. But Chinese immigrants have all become Thai people over generation. So the early history was forgotten for a long time. But the Chinese temple stayed. It has become the main source of memory today.

Ayutthaya in the 17th century was an international commercial city, also a major city in the territory. At the same time there was high competition among businessmen from Great Britain, France, Holland and Portugal. The proportion of Chinese contribution to trade to China and other countries was the highest. The memory of the past has often disappeared but some historical relics remain. The current Chinese people mainly came to Thailand in the early half of the 20th century. Their immigrant history is very short. It is easy to trace their family history. But they are considered as Thai native in order to distinguish them from the ethnic Chinese who have migrated to Thailand from Hong Kong, Taiwan or China since the 1970s.

In recent years, the Hakka people have changed from a hidden ethnic group into a public group. The Hakka people in Ayutthaya have a chance to develop their Hakka identity. The way to remember the past had a new development by using the category of Hakka. Thus they can develop cultural practice to rebuild their history in the name of their ethnic group and to form a multiple approach to their identity.

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