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Hakka Influence on the Educational Landscape of Sabah, Malaysia: A Conceptual Paper

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Abstract: **The purpose of this conceptual paper is to provide an overview of Hakka influence on the educational landscape of Sabah, Malaysia. As the largest Chinese dialect group in Sabah, Hakkas have been a driving force behind the establishment and development of Chinese-medium and vernacular education across the state. The earliest schools established by the Hakka were deeply tied to the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia. Besides the Basel Mission, regional chapters of the Hakka Association have historically mobilized community funds to build early schools and education centers. Out of the nine Chinese independent secondary schools operating in Sabah today, eight were founded or are predominantly managed by Hakka clan associations or eminent Hakka leaders. Hakkas view education as a vital tool for survival, social mobility, and cultural preservation that is deeply rooted in their historical migration and adversity. Their core educational values are grounded on survival and competitiveness. Contemporary Hakkas in Sabah face modern educational realities and language shifts, compromising between economic realities and heritage language. Today, Hakkas prioritize the Malay Language and English that offer stronger instrumental motivation for employment and socioeconomic mobility. Augmented by community bursaries and support systems, current Hakka-supported schools are highly inclusive, enrolling growing numbers of non-Chinese and bumiputera (indigenous) students.**

Keywords: **Basel, Chinese, Hakka influence, Educational landscape, Kudat, Sabah, Malaysia.**

I. INTRODUCTION

As the largest Chinese dialect group in Sabah, Hakkas have been a driving force behind the establishment and development of Chinese-medium and vernacular education across the state. Driven by a cultural emphasis on educating the young, Hakka community leaders, regional clans, and religious groups have established several prominent educational institutions in Sabah. Early education in Sabah was deeply intertwined with the Hakka community, Basel Christian Mission, and local Hakka associations that acted as the fundamental drivers behind community-based education in the state (Ni, Shin, & Fung, 2025; Wong, 2023).

A. Basel Church and Hakka Association

The earliest schools established by the Hakka were deeply tied to the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia (BCCM). Hakka Christian settlers, who began arriving in North Borneo (now Sabah) in the late 1800s, were recruited by the Basel Missionary Society to work as plantation laborers. Wherever they formed a new settlement, they would build a school to disseminate their traditional values and practices among the young. A church was also built beside it; while adults worshipped in it, children could attend Sunday school in a classroom. The Basel Church established the renowned Lok Yuk School System, which spans numerous kindergartens, primary schools, and secondary schools across Kota Kinabalu, Kudat, and Manggatal.

The Lok Yuk School System in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah is a strong network of mission schools established by the Basel Church of Malaysia (historically linked to the Hakka community). Originating in 1934 in Kota Kinabalu, the system includes preschools, primary schools, and secondary schools. Key institutions in the Lok Yuk School System include (1) SMJK Lok Yuk Kota Kinabalu, which is a government-aided Chinese secondary school in Kota Kinabalu, (2) SJK (C) Lok Yuk Likas, which is a Chinese-medium primary school located in Kota Kinabalu known for community activities and student enrichment programs, (3) SJK (C) Lok Yuk Menggatal, which is a Chinese-medium primary school serving the Menggatal area, and (4) SK Lok Yuk Inanam, which is a government primary school located in Inanam recognized for environmental and community initiatives. The schools play a major role in preserving Hakka and Chinese Christian educational heritage in Sabah, while integrating into Malaysia's national education framework (Ni, Shin, & Fung, 2025).

Besides the Basel Mission, regional chapters of the Hakka Association have historically mobilized community funds to build early schools and education centers. Many pioneer educational initiatives today are hosted near, or funded by, Hakka community halls, such as the preschool services near Wisma Hakka in Kota Kinabalu. Hakka-led early education in North Borneo used the Hakka dialect as a structural lingua franca, gradually transitioning to Chinese/English, focusing on literacy, cultural preservation, and basic community skills. The Lok Yuk School System established through the collaboration of the Basel Church and the Hakka community, remains a core educational pillar in Sabah, adopting a framework that prioritizes moral education, trilingual literacy, and structural peer transition (Ni, Shin, & Fung, 2025).

Out of the nine Chinese independent secondary schools operating in Sabah today, eight were founded or are predominantly managed by Hakka clan associations or eminent Hakka leaders. Hakka organizations in Sabah remain actively involved in fundraising for education; for example, the Tuaran District Hakka Association funds ongoing infrastructure development and student access to quality tertiary and vernacular education in Sabah. Wisma Hakka, the central administrative building for local Hakkas, has historically housed and incubated early childhood resource hubs and localized preschool groups, such as the Young Explorers Academy (Ni, Shin, & Fung, 2025).

Overall, the Basel Church, Lok Yuk, and the Hakka Association have greatly promoted socioeconomic development in Sabah through education. Besides, these organizations have created supporting networks that help Hakka families face various challenges, from financial burden to social integration. While the Basel Church acts as a fundraising platform that support underserved families, the Hakka Association offers various welfare programs, including loans and medical assistance (Ni, Shin, & Fung, 2025).

B. Hakka-founded schools in Sabah

Sabah Tshung Tsin Secondary School in Kota Kinabalu was founded and is still managed by the Hakka community. Founded in 1965 by the Sabah Hakka Association (later transferred to the Kota Kinabalu Hakka Association in 1974), it is an independent Chinese secondary school owned and operated by the Kota Kinabalu Hakka Association. It is part of a broader trend in Sabah where the majority of Chinese independent schools are established or led by Hakka cultural associations. The largest Chinese independent high school in Sabah, Tshung Tsin is recognized as a premier cluster school in Malaysia. Institut Sinaran, founded in 1987 as its pre-university centre, was previously owned by the Kota Kinabalu Hakka Association. It currently serves as the main campus of a university college founded by a Hakka entrepreneur and educator (Ni, Shin, & Fung, 2025).

In Tawau, the Sabah Chinese High School is heavily supported financially and structurally by the Tawau Hakka Association. It serves a student demographic that historically has been up to 80 percent Hakka. In Sandakan, Sung Siew was the first Chinese school in Sabah that adopted an English-based curriculum and the English Language as an instructional medium. In Kudat, the connection between Pei Tsin High School and the Hakka community is deeply rooted in local history. The school functions as a vital Chinese independent secondary school serving the Chinese diaspora and surrounding communities at the northern tip of Sabah. Kudat was the first major administrative center established by the British North Borneo Chartered Company in 1881. In 1883, the British began actively bringing in Christian Hakka immigrants from southern China via the Basel Mission to clear the verdant jungles and develop agriculture. Because of this, Kudat became the primary focal point where the Hakka community's history in Sabah truly began (Ni, Shin, & Fung, 2025).

C. Jesselton University College

Established in 1988, Jesselton University College (JUC) was founded by a Sabah-born Hakka entrepreneur and educator in Kota Kinabalu. It is a private higher education institution that focuses on creating educational and career opportunities in various fields, including business administration and education. Over the years, the university college has emphasized flexible and interdisciplinary training and educational systems; it has demonstrated a proven track record, including achieving a 5-star rating from the Ministry of Higher Education for several consecutive years. Due to its commitment and quality in higher education, it was granted university college status in 2021. Being one of Sabah's leading private education institutions, JUC has a long standing recognition from the local authorities. Its programs are recognized and accredited by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) and Ministry of Human Resources. With roots deeply planted in Sabah, Jesselton University College strives to expand its horizon, seeking recognition and accreditations on a global scale. In October 2026, JUC awarded 27 government school teachers a Master of Education in Educational Leadership (Jesselton University College, n. d.).

Hakka-founded educational institutions have provided a foundation for many fresh graduates to enter various professions ranging from medicine, engineering, entrepreneurship, and higher education; for example, JUC now offers Master's and PhD degrees in education and business administration. Their emphasis on academic excellence, together with their strong ties to the Hakka community, fosters a sense of purpose and motivates students to excel in their academic pursuits (Ni, Shin, & Fung, 2025).

Hakka educational institutions in Sabah have significantly driven the state's socioeconomic development by merging rigorous academic standards with strong cultural values and community philanthropy. Established to bridge historical educational gaps, these schools and associations continue to produce a multilingual, skilled workforce, while fostering social cohesion across Sabah's multicultural communities. Historically, colonial-era neglect and post-1962 secondary school entry restrictions left many local youths without access to higher education. Community-led entities such as the Api-Api Hakka Association (now the Kota Kinabalu Hakka Association) stepped in to establish institutions, such as Sabah Tshung Tsin Secondary School in 1965, ensuring greater access to secondary education (Lai, 2026; Madsah & Ariffin, 2024).

Further, Hakka-founded schools emphasize trilingual proficiency in Mandarin, English, and Bahasa Malaysia alongside dual-track curricula (such as the SPM and Unified Examination Certificate). This yields adaptable, globally competitive graduates who contribute to Sabah's business, professional, and public sectors. Additionally, institutions, such as the Lok Yuk School System and Tshung Tsin integrate traditional values (diligence, resilience, and moral integrity) into modern academic frameworks. Over time, these schools have welcomed students from various ethnic and religious backgrounds, promoting interethnic harmony and social mobility. Lastly, local Hakka clan associations actively sustain educational equity through dedicated scholarships and fundraising initiatives. Programs such as the Tuaran District Hakka Association's Education Fund provide vital financial aid to students, easing family burdens and supporting Sabah's broader human capital goals (Lai, 2026; Madsah & Ariffin, 2024).

II. EDUCATION AS A VITAL TOOL

A. Core educational values

Hakka history was characterized by roaming caused by upheaval, privation, or remoteness that prevented the dialect group from pursuing knowledge; consequently, they have always treasured the educational opportunities available. Hakkas view education as a vital tool for survival, social mobility, and cultural preservation that is deeply rooted in their historical migration and adversity. Their core educational values are grounded on survival and competitiveness. Historically facing harsh migratory environments and displacement, their life motto is "to farm when it is sunny and study when rains". They regard education as the primary pathway to overcome hardship and secure a better livelihood. Further, Hakkas demonstrate reverence for literacy and written words. Showing great respect for written text, they traditionally collected and burned discarded paper with writing during holy events dedicated to such literary deities as Cangjie or the creator of Chinese characters and Wenchang Dijun or Lord of Civilization (Hakka Affairs Council, 2018).

B. Apprenticeship

In the olden days, many Hakka youths became educated through apprenticeship in traditional businesses, for example, medicinal halls. Initially, they were restricted to the back of the shop, where they cleaned and prepared food. Relying on their own initiative to learn, they could only enter the shop after closing hours, took a pencil and notebook to practice their

reading and writing beside the medicine drawers that were stacked all the way to the ceiling, each containing several boxes of herbal ingredients. A large medical hall might have 1,000 drawers, each labeled with the names of its contents. Constant exposure to these boxes allowed apprentices to learn many Chinese characters, which gradually increased their literacy and repertoire of knowledge. Hence, many illiterate youths could eventually earn a basic living after their apprenticeship; many even became successful businesspeople and shop-keepers (Jan, 2008).

C. Attitudes toward education

Attitudes toward education among Sabah Hakkas have evolved from historical skepticism, particularly in terms of educating girls, into a strong cultural emphasis on academic achievement, institutional development and English-medium instruction. They have historically anchored their social and educational life through community pillars and mission schools, such as the Basel Church, Lok Yuk School, and Tshung Tsin Secondary School that have helped shape social cohesion and academic progress (Ni, Shin, & Fung, 2025).

Before the 1960s, formal education for Hakka girls was uncommon, as they were traditionally expected to marry early. The arrival of Christian missionaries and British colonists promoted primary education for girls, leading to greater financial independence and social openness amongst Hakka women. Contemporary Hakkas prefer to send their children to Mandarin-medium national-type and independent Chinese schools, which reflects a strong valuation of competitive economic and cultural education. Nevertheless, increased exposure to Mandarin, English, and the Malay Language has coincided with a generational decline in spoken Hakka in Sabah (Ni, Shin, & Fung, 2025).

D. Educational realities and language shifts

Contemporary Hakkas in Sabah face modern educational realities and language shifts; they have to compromise between economic realities and heritage language. Today, they prioritize Mandarin, English, and the Malay Language, which offer strong instrumental motivation for employment and status, leading to a generational decline in spoken Hakka. Nevertheless, Hakka educational authorities and community groups often implement revitalization measures to counter the risk of dialect and cultural loss by offering Hakka immersion programs and regional heritage curricula in schools to reinforce the sociolinguistic competence amongst the young (Yong & Kong, 2022).

III. BUMIPUTERA OR INDIGENOUS STUDENTS

A. Bumiputera or indigenous students

Augmented by community bursaries and support systems, current Hakka-supported schools are highly inclusive, enrolling growing numbers of non-Chinese and bumiputera students. Bumiputera parents in Sabah are increasingly enrolling their children in Chinese national type primary schools (SJKC) primarily due to the high quality of education, strict discipline, the economic value of mastering Mandarin, and practical geographical convenience. This trend is highly pronounced in Sabah, where nearly 70 percent of the 35,000 students across the state's 83 Chinese primary schools are non-Chinese and bumiputeras. In rural and under-enrolled schools, this figure shifts drastically, with non-Chinese students comprising over 90 percent of the school population (Isa, 2024; The Rakyat Post, 2024).

In Sabah, bumiputera parents proactively choose Chinese schools because they (1) value the strong academic reputation and strict classroom discipline typical of Chinese vernacular schools. Further, many of these institutions are well-supported by local community fundraising drives, allowing them to offer such advanced facilities as smart classrooms and digital equipment, (2) view Mandarin as a vital asset for global and local commercial opportunities, believing that trilingual proficiency (Bahasa Malaysia, English, and Mandarin) offers their children a distinct competitive edge, leading to better career prospects and workplace mobility, (3) appreciate the geographical proximity of Chinese schools; in rural Sabah, a local SJKC is often the most accessible or closest school to the family home, which prevents long commutes to national schools, and (4) prize the financial and social inclusivity of Chinese schools; many Chinese school boards and local associations in Sabah actively assist disadvantaged non-Chinese students through bursaries and welfare assistance. The state government also provides substantial financial allocations to support inclusive education and maintenance across these schools (Shyan, 2026).

B. Inclusive education

In 2026, Sabah increased its total allocation for Chinese schools and non-Muslim religious bodies to RM90 million, from RM70 million in 2025, reflecting the state government's commitment to inclusive education and religious harmony. The funding aimed at improving access to education, supporting building maintenance, enhancing learning activities and helping Chinese schools and religious bodies meet their operational needs. To uphold fairness, equality and inclusiveness, the state government focuses on people's needs and the state's future, which must be developed simultaneously (Doksil, 2026).

Chinese schools ensure that Sabah's children have access to quality education without being burdened by financial difficulties. In line with the 2.0 Sabah Maju Jaya development framework, Chinese schools play a crucial role in human capital development, as youths nowadays not only need academic qualifications but also skills, resilience, creativity, and integrity to contribute to the state's socioeconomic progress. They equip the younger generation with skills relevant to emerging industries and the future economy to remain competitive at the state, national and international levels. The collective commitment among Chinese schools, parents, community, alumni, and private sector ensures that students from different racial and religious backgrounds can learn together, while developing their talents, confidence, and discipline. Overall, Chinese schools serve as a good example of Sabah's multicultural unity, which is a prerequisite for the state's stability and advancement (Doksil, 2026).

C. Primary Hakka values

Hakkas in Sabah have historically regarded education as a core pillar for uplifting families, preserving cultural values, and instilling moral discipline. Through clan associations, churches, and Chinese independent schools, moral and character education is deeply intertwined with their community identity and heritage preservation. Primary Hakka values in education include (1) resourcefulness, diligence, and resilience - historical hardship, forced migration, and poverty have inspired modern Hakkas to demonstrate conscientiousness, frugality, and self-reliance, (2) community responsibility – Hakka support for communal schools and clan associations inspires youths to give back to society and honor elders and ancestral roots, and (3) language and identity - while traditional Hakka values and the Hakka dialect have served as the primary moral and social glue, younger generations are increasingly shifting toward English and globalized curricula, prompting Chinese associations to implement cultural and language preservation camps (Hakka Affairs Council, 2018).

D. Five dimensions of education

Hakka educational thought is grounded on the five dimensions of education that are presented as a standard model of holistic learning, which include intellectual, moral, aesthetic, physical, and social development. For over half a century, Sabah's nine Chinese independent high schools (CISH) have adapted these principles to survive and evolve within a unique historical, geographical, and multicultural environment, which represents a remarkable experiment in localizing traditional Chinese educational values (Hakka Affairs Council, 2018).

Intellectual development among Hakkas underscores academic resilience in a trilingual system. Most Sabah CIHS were established after the 1960s that initially served students who had failed entrance examinations or lacked access to other secondary schools. This challenging beginning led Sabah CIHS to develop one of Malaysia's most challenging academic landscape s. To ensure that students remain competitive nationally and internationally, Sabah CIHS have adopted a dual-track system in which students must take both the Unified Examination Certificate (UEC) and the national Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM). In a society that highly values English, Sabah CIHS emphasize trilingual proficiency - excellent English, strong Chinese, and fluent Malay. This model has transformed their reputation and produced graduates capable of pursuing higher education across Asia and the West (Hakka Affairs Council, 2018).

Moral education among Hakkas is deeply rooted in traditional Confucian ethics, clan discipline, and the historical reality of migrating and settling in challenging environments. Rather than treating morality as abstract philosophy, Hakka moral transmission has historically combined family survival, hard work, and literary reverence. Revering literature and valuing education, Hakkas view education not only as a path to social mobility and survival in harsh or competitive environments, but also as a moral duty. The traditional Hakka motto, "to farm when it is sunny and study when rains," reflects an ethic where intellectual and moral discipline go hand-in-hand with manual labor. Further, Hakkas emphasize the dual ethic of diligence and thrift; children are raised with a strict aversion to waste and idleness. Hard work and frugality are regarded as moral virtues that protect the family and clan through economic or migratory hardships. Besides, they also underscore filial

piety and clan harmony; guided by Confucian principles, Hakka family ethics emphasize honoring ancestors, respecting elders, and maintaining mutual aid within the extended family or communal structures. Their ancestral halls historically doubled as community schools where moral precepts and clan genealogies were disseminated (Hakka Affairs Council, 2018).

Aesthetic education among the Hakka people bridges traditional folk arts, vernacular architecture, and modern school curricula to preserve cultural identity across generations. Modern educational initiatives incorporate local Hakka folk arts, songs, and crafts into early childhood curricula to foster cultural cognition and emotional attachment. Additionally, traditional Hakka dwellings (such as tulou or enclosed perimeter complexes) embody formal symmetry, defensive enclosure, and Confucian-Daoist symbolism. Study bases, such as the Longhua District Aesthetic Education Study Base, utilize these historical environments for experiential heritage learning. Moreover, Hakka aesthetic expression is deeply rooted in the labor and lifestyle of working communities. Traditional Hakka embroidery utilizes high-purity, low-saturation dark bases paired with vivid red or green accents, reflecting both a connection to nature and historical Central Plains Han aesthetics. Traditional Hakka opera costumes, makeup, and stage movements are often used to teach cultural design and performance arts. Lastly, extracurricular activities, such as the 24 Festive Drums, Chinese orchestras, calligraphy, and ink painting, coexist alongside modern arts and orchestral music. These programs provide youths with a tangible connection to their heritage, while allowing Hakka culture to flourish in Sabah (Hakka Affairs Council, 2018; Yuan & Kuang, 2024).

The Hakka community has a long-standing tradition of valuing education as a core pillar of social mobility, moral grounding, and cultural survival. Historically summarized by the motto “to farm when it is sunny and to study when it rains”, social education among the Hakkas extends far beyond formal schooling into clan networks, community philanthropy, and institutional building. Rooted in ancestral ideals from northern China, Hakka culture places high respect on written language, teachers, and civil service. Wealthy Hakka patrons and clan associations historically funded neighborhood schools, teacher salaries, and infrastructure rather than hoarding wealth privately. Unlike many traditional societies of the past, Hakka women did not bind their feet and historically worked alongside men. With the arrival of missionary and colonial schooling, access to education empowered Hakka women to gain financial independence, shift cultural norms around marriage, and participate more openly in public life (Hakka Affairs Council, 2018; Tsao, 2015).

Additionally, Hakka associations (such as local Hakka associations and guild halls) act as informal social education hubs, organizing cultural classes, dialect preservation programs, and scholarship funds. In regions with large Hakka diasporas, the community has been a staunch supporter of vernacular and independent education. For example, the Tshung Tsin Secondary School in Kota Kinabalu was established and managed by the local Hakka community to safeguard Chinese language, values, and identity. Social education among Hakkas highlights the importance of building harmony. To reinforce harmonious ethnic relations, CIHS in Sabah have evolved from fostering unity within the Chinese community to promoting intercultural understanding. Increasing numbers of Malay and other indigenous students now attend CIHS, attracted by their discipline and academic standards. Students at CIHS learn to appreciate both Chinese and indigenous cultures, creating a model of multicultural coexistence (Hakka Affairs Council, 2018; Tsao, 2015).

Physical education among Hakkas reflects Sabah’s vast geography, whereby students often travel long distances to participate in various kinds of competitions. Beyond fitness, these experiences cultivate perseverance, adaptability, and resilience, which are qualities that have long sustained overseas Hakka communities. Physical education and sports among the Hakka community in Sabah are deeply intertwined with the community’s historical educational institutions, clan associations, and cultural martial arts traditions. As the largest Chinese subgroup in Sabah, the Hakkas have historically leveraged physical activity to foster community resilience, institutional prestige, and cultural preservation. Hakka-found schools (such as Tshung Tsin) are powerhouses in state-level track and field, basketball, and volleyball, cementing physical education as a core pillar of student identity within the Hakka community (Hakka Affairs Council, 2018).

Physical education also takes the form of traditional martial arts, historically used for self-defense and physical fitness. Given their history as agricultural pioneers and laborers in Sabah's rubber and timber industries, Hakkas regard physical endurance as culturally vital; hence, martial arts styles like Chu Gar Fisticuffs or Southern Mantis have been passed down through clan houses to keep youths physically disciplined. Additionally, lion dragon, and unicorn dances are still practiced vigorously across Sabah, which serve as an intense form of community physical conditioning and acrobatic training for Hakka youth. Besides traditional dances, local Hakka associations regularly sponsor sports tournaments to keep the

community active and connected. Heavily championed by Hakka youth wings, basketball and badminton tournaments often function as informal platforms for physical wellness, community networking, and structural fundraising for local schools (Hakka Affairs Council, 2018).

E. Folklore-based and proxy education system

Hakka folklore and myth traditions in Sabah are deeply tied to their historical migration from southern China, their pioneering life as agricultural settlers, and the integration of traditional Chinese beliefs with the local Bornean landscape. Key elements of Hakka folklore and cultural traditions in Sabah are related to the (1) qilin, which is an auspicious mythical creature that is a distinct pillar of Hakka identity and is widely performed during Chinese New Year and cultural festivals in towns across Sabah, (2) migration and pioneer legends spread though oral history that honors the early settlers; the 1882 Basel Mission-sponsored pioneers who arrived in Kudat were framed with resilient folklore values of hard work, thrift, and community survival, (3) spiritual taboos and cave lore that blend Hakka and local traditions - incorporating strict rules regarding sacred or limestone spaces, such as avoiding laughing, playing loudly, or whistling inside deep caves to avoid offending local or ancestral spirits, (4) syncretic community practices that allow Hakka folklore to coexist alongside the rich indigenous mythologies of Sabah, such as the Kadazandusun myth of Nunuk Ragang, leading to localized temple practices, veneration of the earth god, and the ghost festival (Yip, 2013).

Having endured multiple mass migrations and resource scarcity, Hakkas underscore superstitions, taboos, and folk rituals as cultural constraints to enforce discipline, hygiene, and social order. They function as a proxy system of primary education, embedding crucial lessons in survival, morality, environmental stewardship, and academic excellence directly into everyday family rules. First, Hakkas place a high premium on academic achievement, historically summarized by the proverb that says - farming when it is sunny, study when it rains. This value has produced deeply spiritual taboos regarding written text. Hence, it is a taboo to step on, throw away, or use paper with writing on it to wipe tables or remove filth; doing so may invite spiritual blindness or cosmic misfortune upon the children in the family. This belief teaches children from infancy that literacy is sacred, instilling a profound respect for books, teachers, and learning (Hakka Affairs Council, 2018).

Second, many Hakka domestic taboos are framed as spiritual warnings and designed to cultivate good etiquette and behavior among children. Children who tap their bowl with chopsticks may end up as beggars in their next life. This taboo prevents annoying behavior, maintains peace at the table, and preserves fragile eating utensils. The myth that children leaving rice grains in their bowl will eventually marry someone with a pockmarked face underscores the importance of farming and food conservation. The belief that children who point directly at the moon will cause the moon goddess to slice their ears off teaches the young to show general restraint and spatial awareness, avoiding rude pointing gestures (Hakka Affairs Council, 2018).

Third, many Hakkas still use supernatural boundaries to enforce cleanliness and stop the spread of disease. It is still a taboo to sweep the floor outward during new year's day as it is believed to expel the household's wealth and invite wandering spirits. The reality is that, sweeping in poorly lit houses risks sweeping away dropped valuables or tracking filth into sleeping quarters. Through strict, ritually bound cleaning schedules, such as sweeping inward to collect wealth, children will learn structured domestic maintenance. The taboo that people should not sleep facing a mirror, or their soul will be trapped/stolen, stops children from waking up in pitch-black rooms, seeing their own reflections, panicking, and disrupting the household's sleep (Hakka Affairs Council, 2018).

Fourth, Hakkas have some deep-rooted eco-superstitions that protect the natural environment.

They have developed deep spiritual connections to the geography of their settlements, particularly through feng shui and the worship of the earth deity and dragon spirits. It is a taboo to cut down old trees or modify natural water paths at the entrance of a village, as it would anger the local spirits, causing sickness or sudden poverty. This folk belief is a form of ecological and civil engineering education, which prevents deforestation, protects the village from mudslides, and prevents the contamination of shared water sources (Hakka Affairs Council, 2018).

F. Hakka proverbs

Hakka proverbs serve as a vital educational tool, carrying traditional life lessons. morals, and a strong cultural emphasis on scholarship as a means of survival and advancement. Historically migratory and often living in harsh or competitive environments, Hakkas view education as the primary ladder for socioeconomic mobility. The Hakka proverb saying that it

is better to raise a pig than a son who does not study hard underscores that hard work without a decent education tends to lack direction or value. The saying that people who do not study will lack proper judgment highlights that critical thinking and moral discernment come strictly through learning. To emphasize their deep cultural pride and protective nature regarding their linguistic identity, Hakkas would rather sell their ancestral farmland than forgetting their own dialect that serves as the ultimate link to their roots. The Hakka proverb, "rely on the mountain, the mountain can fall; rely on the water, the water can diminish; rely on people, people can age" implies that true security comes from self-reliance, which reflects the customary Hakka spirit of hard work, resilience, and survival in the face of harsh terrain, isolation, or severe environmental hazards (Wiktionary, n. d.).

In sum, Hakka proverbs function as moral compasses using satire, parables, and reprimands to teach family values, resilience, and personal character. Based on real-life folk experiences, Hakka couplets draw heavily from everyday agrarian and communal life, turning practical survival wisdom into memorable lessons for the young. Integrating Hakka proverbs into modern curricula helps students connect personal identity with academic engagement. Educators often use these oral traditions to bridge traditional wisdom with contemporary teaching methods, ensuring the preservation of centuries-old Hakka values and wisdom (Wiktionary, n. d.).

IV. CONCLUSION

The Hakka community has played a foundational role in shaping Sabah's educational, religious, and cultural landscape, particularly through the establishment of key institutional pillars, community associations, and mission schools. Hakka-led or Hakka-associated organizations historically pioneered formal schooling in Sabah, combining spiritual guidance, Western-style or vernacular literacy, and community integration. The Lok Yuk School System (linked with the Basel Church) served as an early educational anchor for the Chinese community, providing foundational literacy and moral instruction. Sabah Tshung Tsin Secondary School (managed and reformed by the Kota Kinabalu and Sabah Hakka Associations) has evolved into a prominent Chinese independent high school, driving the development of Chinese secondary education in the state. As primary social networks, the Basel Church and Hakka Association have built schools, organized welfare, and maintained community cohesion across urban and rural settlements in Sabah. In contemporary Sabah, the educational milieu has shifted. Heavy emphasis on English and Mandarin in Chinese-medium and private schools, alongside national educational requirements, has caused a generational language shift, with many younger Hakkas now pivoting toward English, Malay, and Mandarin as dominant daily languages, prompting local Hakka associations to step up cultural and language preservation efforts.

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