

# Status Quo of Sexism in Hakka Areas of China

-- Take Nanqi Town, Jiaoling County, a Town under the Jurisdiction of the World Hakka Capital as an Example

**Kunnan Chen**

Hong Kong, Metropolitan University, Hong Kong, China

---

**Abstract:** There are more than 80 million Hakka people in the world, but in the history of Hakka studies in the past two centuries, it is rare for scholars to specialize in "Hakka women's groups". Hakka women have been persecuted to varying degrees since ancient times, all because of the deep-rooted concept of sexism in the Hakka area. This paper explores the current situation of sexism in Hakka area in China and proposes some solutions.

**Keywords:** Hakka women, Sexism, Family studies, Meizhou, Hakka studies.

---

## 1. Introduction

The Hakka area is the general name of Meizhou in Guangdong, Longyan in Fujian and Ganzhou in Jiangxi and other places. There are more than 80 million Hakkas in the world, and many great people are Hakkas, such as revolutionary Sun Yat-sen, politicians Lee Teng-hui, Tsai Ing-Wen, Lee Kuan Yew and others. Since the beginning of the 19th century, Hakka scholars around the world have never stopped studying Hakka. In the middle of the 19th century, missionaries from Germany, Switzerland, Britain and other countries came to the Hakka area of China to preach for nearly a century, leaving books of great academic value. [1] Hakka culture has been criticized by a few Hakka scholars for persecuting Hakka women. Sexism in China Hakka area is deeply rooted and is caused by a variety of factors [2]. First, Hakka clan rules are very unfriendly to Hakka women. Once upon a time, Hakka women who were unfaithful to their husbands would be tied with chains and heavy stones, stuffed into pig cages, thrown into deep rivers to drown in public. In 2012, experts accidentally found more than 10 female human skeletons tied by chains and hands tied at a depth of 46 meters in the 50-meter-deep LVKUTAN (a deep pool of green caves) in Yanqian Village, Longwen Town, Meixian District, Meizhou, Guangdong. In addition, the system of woman chastity recognition officially rewards women who do not remarry after the death of their husbands, there is still a long-preserved chastity archway in Xifeng East Road, Jiaoling, called "Under the Archway". [3] Second, the deformed marriage system of Hakka women. In the past, many Hakka girls were sold by their biological parents at clearly marked prices, and there were also phenomena such as "selling concubines" and "selling wives to pay off debts". Hakka women have little educational opportunities and are required to look after their husbands and children, according to the "Autobiography of Shing-Tung Yau" written by the international mathematician of Jiaoling [6]. Third, in Hakka areas, sons are obliged to support their parents, [4]. In the past, female infanticide among Hakka women was rampant in order to produce as many sons as possible at minimal economic cost [5]. Jiaoling County is the smallest and least populated county in Meizhou, only 184,000 people. The economy is very backward. Since 2017, the female registered

population of Jiaoling have shown a continuous downward trend. This paper takes the case of sexism in three intermarried families in Nanqi Town, Jiaoling. Nanqi is the second-lowest town in Jiaoling in population and economy and GDP was accounting for only 3% of Jiaoling. Nanqi is the only town with a sex ratio (male to female) of more than 110, exceeding the normal range (102 to 107). Nanqi is the town with the densest peaks with a forest coverage rate of 85%. There is serious sexism in Nanqi because it is far from the city, up to 40km. Traffic is blocked, and the complete road to the urban area has only been built in the 21st century [7]. Nanqi has the lowest average education years for people over 15 years old in Jiaoling County and is now close to the stage of severe population aging.

According to the literature method, I found a family tree in Nanqi, "The Family Tree of the Chan's Zhong Yigong clan of Zuo Huai" (618 pages in total). Of the 93 members of the compilation committee of the genealogy, only one woman. None of the Clan activities in the genealogy have more women than men. According to my survey, most men in Nanqi think that women are not eligible to participate in clan activities. In this genealogy, except for the daughters of male descendants after the 20th century, only sons are recorded in the previous hundreds of years. The 618-page genealogy contains about 65% of the records of the Chan family's reproduction of sons over the generations. The genealogy records that the marriage custom of girls in Nanqi Town is arranged marriage by parents, and girls have no right to resist or refuse, which is one of the problems arising from sexism. The genealogy also records the rules for holding baby full moon banquet in Nanqi Town: only baby boys are eligible to set up a banquet, but baby girls are not. They think that having a son is a happy event, but having a daughter is a bad event. In 2017~2022, I used the field investigation, follow-up study, the non-participation observation method, the in-depth interview method, the literature method, and the social network analysis method to investigate and study the "the Ho family of Jiahua Village, the Chan family of Zuohuai Village, and the Kwok family of Shizhai Village" (intermarriage) in Nanqi Town, Jiaoling County, Meizhou, China, the Hakka capital of China, these three families are very representative and typical Chinese Hakka villages. According to the characteristics of the three families, I counted the data of

positive and negative indicators and the ranking of the three families, as shown below. (Italic and bold fonts are negatively

evaluated)

Evaluation Indicators	Data Comparison of Three Families	Data
Proportion of non-sexist offspring is sexist	Chan's = Ho's > Kwok's	25% = 25% > 0%
Proportion of families that have undergone prenatal fetal sex testing	Chan's > Kwok's > Ho's	73% > 63% > 43%
Proportion of happy people	Chan's > Kwok's > Ho's	56% > 54% > 37%
Proportion of poor relationship with children	Chan's > Kwok's > Ho's	40% > 33% > 29%
Proportion of high school education	Chan's > Kwok's > Ho's	37% > 29% > 9%
Proportion of pre-marital pregnancy	Chan's > Kwok's > Ho's	27% > 25% > 24%
Proportion of small rich families	Chan's > Kwok's = Ho's	20% > 0% = 0%
Proportion of live in second-tier cities in Asia	Chan's > Kwok's > Ho's	12% > 4% > 0%
Proportion of males	Chan's > Ho's > Kwok's	72% > 58% > 46%
Proportion of women with unhappy marriages	Chan's > Ho's > Kwok's	67% > 65% > 55%
Proportion of college degree holders	Chan's > Ho's > Kwok's	37% > 35% > 22%
Proportion of patients with depression	Chan's > Ho's > Kwok's	35% > 33% > 29%
Proportion of graduate degree holders	Kwok's > Chan's = Ho's	7% > 5% = 5%
Proportion of women who have pressure to have sons	Kwok's > Chan's = Ho's	91% > 80% = 80%
Proportion of live in first-tier cities in Asia	Kwok's > Chan's > Ho's	59% > 46% > 32%
Proportion of sexists	Kwok's > Chan's > Ho's	57% > 40% > 37.5%
Proportion of men beat their wives	Kwok's > Chan's > Ho's	50% > 40% > 37%
Proportion of well-off families	Kwok's > Chan's > Ho's	27% > 26% > 0%
Average childbearing age of women (first child)	Kwok's > Chan's = Ho's	25 years old > 23 years old = 23 years old
Proportion of high-yield families	Kwok's > Ho's > Chan's	37% > 10% > 7%
Proportion of women have abortions	Kwok's > Ho's > Chan's	27% > 25% > 20%
Proportion of people without sons	Kwok's > Ho's > Chan's	25% > 14% > 13%
Proportion of live in second-tier cities in China	Kwok's > Ho's > Chan's	21% > 3% > 0%
Proportion of primary school education	Kwok's > Ho's > Chan's	21% > 18% > 5%
Number of suicides	Kwok's > Ho's > Chan's	2 > 1 > 0
Proportion of live in fourth-tier cities in China	Ho's > Chan's > Kwok's	65% > 45% > 25%
Proportion of poverty families	Ho's > Chan's > Kwok's	45% > 27% > 18%
Proportion of descendants of sexists are also sexists	Ho's > Chan's > Kwok's	42% > 33% > 30%
Proportion of middle-class families	Ho's > Chan's > Kwok's	25% > 20% > 9%
Number of teacher-student romances	Ho's > Chan's > Kwok's	2 > 1 > 0
Proportion of junior high school education	Ho's > Kwok's > Chan's	31% > 21% > 16%
Proportion of very poor families	Ho's > Kwok's > Chan's	20% > 9% > 0%

All three families have 7 negative indicators. According to the above table, it can be concluded that the Chan family is a male-dominated family that loves baby boys extremely. Women are forced to undergo prenatal fetal sex testing. There are many people in the Chan family have poor relationships with their children and many people with depression. According to my interview survey, the family atmosphere of the Chan family is very depressing, male elders are used to authoritarian education and beating education, children are not allowed to have the slightest dissenting opinion, and they must do anything according to the requirements of male elders. The Kwok family has a very serious sexism, and it is unethical to be able to undergo prenatal sex testing and abortion in order to give birth to a son. Women also suffer from great fertility pressure and the pain of being beaten, and the number of suicides is the highest among the three families. The number of suicides is 2, and all are women.

According to the data in the above table, the proportion of families who have done prenatal fetal sex testing is 43%~73%, which is a high proportion, and at the beginning of the 21st century, China has completely banned non-medically necessary fetal sex determination. The proportion of unhappy marriages of women is 55%~67%, more than half. The proportion of depressed patients is 29%~35%, which is at least five times that of depressed patients (6%) in China [8]. The proportion of families with the pressure of having a son is 80%~91%, and almost every family wants to have a son, which is very abnormal. Wife beaters account for 37%~50%. Research data show that wife beaters in China account for 29.7%~35.7%, and more than 25% of women in the world have been beaten by their husbands, which shows that the proportion of wife beaters in Nanqi Town exceeds the global or Chinese common range. To sum up, women in Nanqi live in a place where sexism is very serious. Based on the data and

ranking of the evaluation index table, I draw the following correlation:

Relationship	Index
Positive Correlation	Proportion of sexist & Proportion of men beat wives
	Proportion of prenatal fetal sex testing & Proportion of poor relationship with children
	Proportion of men & Proportion of women with unhappy marriage & Proportion of patients with depression
	Average childbearing age of women & Proportion of women under pressure to have sons
	Proportion of primary school education & Proportion of abortion women & Proportion of no sons & Number of suicides
	Proportion of poor families & Proportion of live in China's fourth-tier cities & Number of teachers and students romance
Negative Correlation	Proportion of Happy People & Proportion of very poor Families
	Proportion of life in China's fourth tier cities & Proportion of well-off families
	Proportion of sexist , wife beaters & Proportion middle-class families
	Proportion of women with unhappy marriages , depressed patients & Proportion of high-yield families
	Proportion of women have abortions , number of suicides & Proportion of college degree holders
	Proportion of poverty families , number of love between teachers and students & proportion of live in first-tier cities in Asia

According to the above related relationships, measures can be proposed: First, reducing sexist, prenatal fetal sex testing, and women's fertility pressure can reduce the sex ratio to a certain extent, then women with unhappy marriages and depressed patients will decrease. Second, women should improve their academic degree as much as possible, try to live in first-tier or second-tier cities in Asia, improve their income and cognitive level. In this way, they can try to avoid the occurrence of undesirable phenomena, such as forcing women to have abortions, beating wives, and teacher-student romance. I conducted a follow-up study on a family in 2017~2022, and features are: parents are serious sexist, and daughter have wrong values because of her parents' sexist concepts and change the trajectory of her lives. The development of the family is: in 2017, after the extramarital affair between Mr. Ho, born in 1983, and his female student, Miss Wu, born in 1998, was exposed by his first wife, Mr. Ho chose to divorce, Miss Wu gave up the opportunity to go to university and suffered from depression. The root of this deformed relationship is: Miss Wu's parents are serious sexist, Miss Wu's parents have no son, they let their daughter become a rural left-behind child from a young age, so she is very lacking in love, psychologically distorted, fell in love with the male teacher Mr. Ho, she appreciates Mr. Ho's and the most important thing is to be able to help and care for her like her father. The main people responsible for this tragedy are: Miss Wu's parents, who did not interfere with their daughter from beginning to end, allowed her daughter to become a concubine, and even asked Miss Wu to ask Mr. Ho for all the expenses and reduce their expenses. After Miss Wu suffered from depression and dropped out of school, she did not work every day, stayed at home, and her daily task was to accompany Mr. Ho. she became a mother at the age of 22. According to my investigation, Miss Wu got good grades and was admitted to an undergraduate university in a first-tier city in Asia, but at least 500km away from Mr. Ho, they couldn't see each other often, and for love, she gave up the opportunity to fight for twelve years to be admitted to the university. In China, rural left-behind children like Miss. Wu can only change their fate by going to university. Now, Mr. Ho gives Miss Wu very little living expenses, they are living very

poorly, and Mr. Ho's fixed assets worth \$125,000 do not register Miss Wu's property right. Mr. Ho is currently only willing to pay Miss Wu a part of the social insurance money, so that she can receive a monthly subsidy of about 140 \$ after the age of 50. It can be seen from this case that the sexism concept of Miss Wu's parents has seriously affected Miss Wu's mental health and life trajectory. According to my dozens of face-to-face contacts with the clients, assuming that Miss Wu's parents can pay more attention to her, it will definitely prevent her from having an extramarital affair with a male teacher, then she will not give up the opportunity to go to university, so that she can stop the loss in time, will not suffer from so much harm from the male teacher and suffer from depression, and after receiving higher education in a developed city, she can stay there to work and obtain a household registration in the developed city, and she has every chance to be an independent woman.

In 2017~2022, I used the in-depth interview method (unstructured interview, informal interview) and communicated with 2 members of the three families in Nanqi Town. The first person is Kwok A.Q. of the Kwok family, she is the eldest daughter-in-law of Chan H.H of the Chan family and Ho Q.F. of the Ho family. In 2017, she recounted her unhappy marriage: "My husband and I fell in love in 1993, we had a spiritual resonance because both mothers had multiple suicide experiences, and we never considered whether it would be a new disaster if people from bad families like us were married. I got pregnant shortly after we got married, but his parents forced me to have an abortion, and I don't want to say why. When I became pregnant again in 1999, his parents forced me to go for a prenatal fetal sex test, which found out that I was carrying a daughter, and since then, his parents have treated me badly, including when I gave birth. When my daughter was 6 years old, my relationship with my husband was provoked by his parents, who beat me particularly cruelly, leaving me covered in bruises, and he also beat my two children, and my husband was clearly violent. My husband was not at all apologetic about this, my daughter wrote him postcards for more than a month. My husband's parents were very bad for my daughter, but very nice and indulgent to the grandson. It wasn't until 2014, when

I gave birth to my son, that this unfair treatment slowly diminished. I had severe depression in 2015, which I treated for four years before recovering, and my daughter also had depression and took a year off from school. "The second interviewer is Ho Q.F. of the Ho family. In 2017, she talked about the suicide of Kwok Z.P.'s daughter: "I can understand what you said about the unwillingness of Kwok family members to respond to this issue head-on. Because as far as I know, Kwok Z.P.'s daughter was premeditatedly raped by a blood relative, her parents are serious sexist and did not care about her tragic experience, so she could not accept the blow and drank pesticides to commit suicide, leaving a suicide note accusing the rapist. In 2020, Ho Q.F. recounted his unhappy marriage: "I committed suicide many times in 1980s and 1990s. My marriage was arranged for me by my parents, I had no choice, my husband is a rough and authoritarian person, he treats me badly, he scolds me every day, sometimes beats me, the last time I committed suicide was in 1993, I almost died, and many people in Zuohuai Village know about my suicide. However, until now we are almost 70 years old, and he still treats me very badly, but I have always been patient."

Sexism is very cruel to women, and sexism can lead to domestic violence, abortion, fertility pressure, depression, suicide, unhappiness and other social problems, which are very fatal to women. Ending sexism is therefore a necessary action worldwide. I have counted the research on Hakka women in China in the 21st century, and the data comes from CNKI, an academic platform under the China National Nuclear Corporation, which is the most authoritative academic platform in China. According to CNKI data, the number of achievements of "Hakka women" in Chinese Hakka research accounts for only 2% of the total number of achievements, and Hakka women are not the main research object in the field of Hakka research in China. In 2003~2008, the number of research results of Hakka women in China continued to increase at an average rate of 57%. But in 2009~2012, it only increased by an average of 8.6%. In 2013~2021, and a sharp drop of 87% in 2022. Hakka women's studies are precarious for reasons why few scholars specialize in Hakka women's studies. Hakka women's studies in China also receive very little funding. According to CNKI data, the publication of research results on Hakka women in China is wider than that of Hakka study. The results of Chinese Hakka women's studies are published in academic journals in and around Hakka area, northern China, eastern China, central China, and southwest China, and these journals have a greater influence than journals published by Hakka studies. The total impact factor of foreign academic journals accounted for 15.5% of the total influencing factors of all research results of Hakka women studies. Among the journals published by Hakka women's studies in China, journals in the UK and the US, northern China, Fuzhou and Guangzhou have a large influence, while journals in Hakka area, eastern China and southwest China have little influence. There are more female than male scholars in Hakka women's studies in China, and 45% have the title of mentor, indicating that no more than half of the scholars led professional research teams, while most scholars in Hakka studies led professional research teams. Doctoral supervisors account for only 13%, master's supervisors accounted for 32%. Associate professors accounted for 24% and women associate professors 89%. Jiangxi scholars and Fujianese scholars are the main force in the study of Hakka women, most of the main scholars of Hakka women's studies work in Hakka areas, and the largest

amount of research results of Hakka women's studies is also from Hakka areas.

According to my research on CNKI data, I found that Chinese Hakka studies are mainly limited to Hakka scholars, research institutions in Hakka areas, and academic journals in Hakka regions and have very low influence, which makes it difficult for Hakka studies to spread to other regions, and almost no non-Hakka scholars participate in research, and scholars' work units are rarely far from Hakka areas. In addition, although the spread of Hakka women's studies is greater than that of Hakka studies, there are few scholars and few results, and there is a lack of more and better professional research teams in other regions (especially foreign countries). If research institutions in other parts of the world are widely involved in Hakka women's studies and publish their research results in high-impact academic journals around the world, it is conducive to increasing people's attention to the "Hakka women's group". In response to this suggestion, I counted the relevant regions involved in Hakka women's studies and local universities in these areas that have the academic ability to study Hakka women. I judged whether a university has the ability to study Hakka women based on whether it has majors in social sciences, anthropology, women's studies, gender studies, Asian studies, East Asian culture, history, ethnology, family studies, folklore study, etc., and excluded universities that are not eligible such as pure science and engineering universities, pure science and technology universities, pure medical schools, pure finance and economics universities, pure language universities, pure agricultural universities, pure sports universities, and pure film and television universities. Based on this, I can conclude which universities in which regions are involved in Hakka women's studies will bring greater help and exposure to the Hakka women's group. Eventually I concluded: Beijing and Shanghai have many high-quality universities and are ranked at the top, and the gap between local universities is small. There are only some high-quality universities in Guangzhou, and the level gap between local universities is large. There are few universities in Hunan Province that can study Hakka women, but the quality is relatively good. There are only a few high-quality universities in Wuhan and Sichuan Province, most of which are of average quality, and the gap between local universities is large. The quality of universities in Guangxi Province is average, the gap between the head universities is large, and the level of universities at the lower level is comparable. There are no high-quality universities but poor quality universities in the Hakka area, and the quality of universities at the middle level is similar, and there are not many universities that can study Hakka women. The United States has the most universities with the ability to study Hakka women and the best quality. The quality of British universities is worse than that of the United States, and the universities that can study Hakka women are much less than in the United States, although somewhat worse than the US, are generally of good quality. The quality of Japanese universities is at the middle level in the world, and the gap between universities is large. The quality of South Korea's head universities is worse than Japan's, and the gap between Korean universities is smaller than Japan. Chinese mainland there are more universities that have the ability to study Hakka women, but the gap between universities is relatively large, the overall university quality is worse than Japan, the head university is better than Korean universities, and the quality of the world's top universities that Chinese mainland has is second only to the United States and

the United Kingdom. Switzerland does not have the world's top universities, but most of the university quality is in the forefront of the world. The top three universities in Hong Kong are high-quality universities, the quality of universities is uneven. The quality of India's universities and other regions is very different, India's head universities are located at the global middle level, and the rest of the schools are of relatively poor quality. The quality of universities in the above seven regions can be divided into four levels: A, B, C, and D. Grade A: the United States, and the United Kingdom. Grade B: Japan, Chinese mainland, South Korea. Grade C: Switzerland, Hong Kong. Grade D: India. Of the 17 Hakka museums in the world, 82% are located in the Hakka area and only one is located in a foreign country, which is Indonesia with the third largest Hakka population in the world. The Hakka Research Center and Museum in Meizhou, the world's Hakka capital, is the highest in the world. I believe that the solutions to improve the gender discrimination of Hakka women can be the participation of high-quality local universities capable of studying Hakka women in the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Switzerland, Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Wuhan, and Hunan (in order of research ability). Rationale: The United States and the United Kingdom are the most academically advanced regions in the world, Japan and South Korea are both about 2,000 km away from the Hakka region, and both belong to East Asia. Hong Kong and Switzerland are the source of Hakka missionaries in the 19~20th century, and Swiss and Pakse missionaries first went to Hong Kong to preach and established the Hong Kong Chongzhen Society, and then moved into the Hakka region to preach. Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou are among the top cities in China in terms of economic and educational level.

This article records the problem of gender discrimination in the Hakka region of China, and based on a five-year fieldwork in Nanqi Town, Jiaoling County. I deeply analyze the seriousness of the problem of gender discrimination in the Hakka area of China today, and disclose the various physical and mental injuries caused by gender discrimination suffered by Hakka women in China. There is no doubt that the concept of sexism in the Hakka region is contrary to ethics and morality, and it is completely unacceptable to modern people. It is undeniable that the Hakka group can survive to this day and even continue to grow, inseparable from their "sexist concept", it is precisely because the Hakka people invest money, resources, etc. in Hakka men. However, in modern society, with the development of commerce, mechanized

industry and globalization, the Hakka people no longer need to rely entirely on agriculture to survive, but there is still a serious gender discrimination problem left over from ancient times, which is a historical problem, but it is urgent to improve or even eliminate the concept of gender discrimination, for Hakka women to fight for gender equality, education equality of normal people's life, most women who have suffered gender discrimination will have mental unhealthy phenomena, which also needs more psychologists to help them. By studying the current situation of Hakka studies and Hakka women's studies in China, as well as the academic level and capacity of some regions of the world, this paper proposes a solution: that is, high-quality universities in China and more developed regions around the world are needed to participate in Hakka women's studies. In the future, I hope that foreign countries will pay attention to the serious gender discrimination suffered by Hakka women, and more scholars will come to China's Hakka region to conduct research.

## References

- [1] ZHOU Jian-xin. The Research Progress and Theoretical Paradigm of Hakka Culture. *Journal of GUANGXI University for Nationalities (philosophy and social science edition)*. NOV.2016. VOL.38 NO.6. 1673—8179 (2016) 06-0081-05 [J]
- [2] ZOU Chun-sheng. Material, System, Spiritual: The hierarchy of Hakka culture—— an academic investigation based on the perspective of cultural studies. *Journal of Southwest Minzu University (Humanities and Social Science)* .DEC.2005. 1004—3926(2005) 12—0068—04 [J]
- [3] HE Chao. Hakka culture and modern civilization. *JIANGXI social sciences*. JAN.2007.1004-518X(2007)01-0145-04 [J]
- [4] ZHONG Jin-lan. Analysis of the reasons for the maintenance of fertility beliefs among rural Hakka women. *Agricultural Archaeology*.JUN.2010. 1006 - 2335(2010) 06 - 0257 - 03 [J]
- [5] YANG Yang. Study of Hakka Women by Ernest John Eitel. *History Teaching Problems*.APR.2021. [J]
- [6] Shing-Tung Yau. "My Geometric Life: Yau's Autobiography". Jiangsu Yilin Publishing House Co., Ltd. Nanjing, Jiangsu, China.2021 [K]
- [7] CHEN Han-qing. An old district village opened a road. *Origins*.MAY.1999 [N]
- [8] Xinwen Ren. Burden of depression in China, 1990–2017: Findings from the global burden of disease study 2017. *Journal of Affective Disorders* Volume 268, 2020. PP 95-101 [J]