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聖保羅男女中學
St. Paul's Co-educational College

「"Rowing to a happily ever after" - The Transformation
and Preservation of the Hoklos' Wedding Traditions in
Modern Day Hong Kong」

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The 12th Inter-School Competition of Project Learning on Hong Kong's History and Culture

At home in Hong Kong: Stories of Chinese Immigrants over Hundred Years

St Paul's Co-educational College

Category A: Written Report (Senior category) (HC_22_SA05)

**Research Topic: "Rowing to a happily ever after" — The
Transformation and Preservation of the Hoklos' Wedding
Traditions in Modern Day Hong Kong**

Group Leader - Lo Man Yi Kristen

Group Members

- Lin Wei Xin
- Seto Ching Grace
- Yung Tsz Kiu
- Fung Leong Kwan

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I. Introduction

“The vast majority of rural people in history were illiterate, and their history was not recorded in writing, but was passed down from generation to generation through activities such as ritual performances.” said historian David Faure.¹ This statement could not hold more true for the Hoklos in Hong Kong.

Looking across the Victoria Harbour, and taking in the city’s breathtaking skyline lined with modern skyscrapers, it is difficult for the modern day Hong Kong citizen to imagine that this city had once been a quaint fishing village that blossomed into the prosperous city it is today. Unbeknownst to many, Hong Kong’s 1,178 kilometres long coastline is home to various groups of water practitioners, such as fishermen, boat dwellers and oyster farmers, who collectively shape Hong Kong’s brilliant marine culture for over a hundred years. Hong Kong’s marine culture would not be as unique and rich as it is today if it weren’t for the fishermen groups who immigrated to Hong Kong over the century, hence our research sets to focus on the culture of such ethnic groups, specifically the Hoklos, by studying their traditions and customs.

Over the years of immigrating to Hong Kong, the Hoklo people diligently adapted to the rapidly-changing cityscape, as the city underwent multiple stages of economic transition, further straying the city’s development from its roots by the sea. In the process of coming to shore, a lot of the Hoklos’ traditional practices that were intended for the seas were forced to undergo elimination or changes in order to adapt to modern city life, including the famed dragon-boat dancing rituals. Therefore, it is imperative that the traditions and customs upheld by generations of Hoklos are studied and documented so that such vibrant culture will not fade out, and eventually be lost in the culture melting pot that is Hong Kong.

This research sets out to survey the cultural adaptations of the Hoklos since they immigrated to Hong Kong through studying their marriage traditions. Though the Hoklos lived on the sea for prolonged periods of their lives and hence were not highly educated nor wealthy, they held high standards for their wedding ceremonies to have as many and elaborate rituals as possible, as they believed that it symbolised the respect and unity between the two families, as well as the honour of their own family. Therefore, such wedding rituals and ceremonies deeply reflect the values of the Hoklos, providing us a comprehensive understanding of the tangible and intangible aspects of Hoklo culture.

This essay will delve into two aspects of the Hoklos’ marriage culture, namely the wedding attire of the bride and the dragon-boat dancing ritual, in two separate parts. Each part will delineate the customs of the traditional wedding practices and locally adapted modern

¹ Faure, D. (2016). *Mingqing Shehui He Liyi*. Chung Hwa Book Company (Hong Kong) Limited. (明清社會和禮儀)

wedding practices, with comparison to analyse the preservation attempts and transformations made by local Hoklos. This will be followed by an evaluation of the specific factors leading to such changes in the wedding customs, to present a holistic view of the marriage culture of the Hoklos over the years since immigrating to Hong Kong. Furthermore, in order to present a bigger picture of the status quo faced by the Hoklos in maintaining their unique cultural identity, the general factors leading to overall transformation of Hoklo marriage culture will be evaluated and whether they are successful in preserving their culture and traditions. Last but not least, the significance of passing on such marriage traditions to the Hoklo community's sense of identity and belonging in Hong Kong will be explored to raise awareness on the cultural preservation of Hoklo culture.

In terms of methodology, to gather credible first-hand information on the past traditions and development of the Hoklos' marriage culture, we conducted an interview with Ms. Ranae So, a Hoklo and the founder of Marital Tie on Sea, a community-driven preservation project under the Intangible Cultural Heritage Funding Scheme, that aims to promote the culture and history of the Hoklos' wedding ceremonies by organising guided experiences of the traditional marriage customs, as well as carrying out documentation in an effort to preserve the slowly fading Hoklo culture. We also visited the exhibition on Hoklo wedding culture organised by Marital Tie on Sea in Tai Po Yuen Chau Tsai Tai Wong Yeh Temple, to able to see the actual costumes and accessories used in Hoklo marriage ceremonies and gather more information. Moreover, we will also rely on secondary sources such as books and journals that document Hoklo marriage customs, as well as multimedia sources of Hoklo wedding ceremonies, to gain more insights on Hoklo marriage culture.