Native Lexical Innovation in Penang Hokkien: Thinking beyond *Rojak*

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1 Introduction¹

A few years ago, in a box of yellowed papers at the back of a cluttered antique shop in Chulia Street in George Town, I came upon a small green volume entitled “Chinese New Terms and Expressions” that had been published in Shanghai in 1913. The author, Evan Morgan, had spent several years collecting and noting down recently coined Chinese words he came across in newspapers, magazines, and books, and his work was a testimony to the rapid changes that had occurred in the Chinese written and spoken language over the previous decades, as China transformed itself from empire to nation-state and words for new technology and new ideas had entered the language. Having spent the previous few weeks wandering around George Town collecting vocabulary for a dictionary of the Hokkien language as spoken in Penang,² as I leafed through this volume it occurred to me that although many of the new Chinese terms it recorded were shared with other varieties of Hokkien – such as those spoken in Amoy and Taiwan – a fair number of these had not gained currency in the Hokkien of Penang. As Amoy and Taiwanese varieties have tended to follow the lead of Japanese and Mandarin in the creation of their modern vocabularies, Penang Hokkien vocabulary has, to some extent, modernized along a different trajectory. This is due in part to Penang Hokkien speakers’ longstanding acceptance of loanwords from Malay and English – hence the common metaphor *rojak* ‘spicy fruit-and-vegetable salad’ – and their free use of these in place of native Hokkien vocabulary, but another significant contributing

1 All Hokkien words are transcribed according to the POJ or Church Romanization system with significant modifications for Penang pronunciation.

2 Although it is not used in either China or Taiwan, I employ “Hokkien” in its Southeast Asian sense as a catch-all for the spoken idioms of the Zhangzhou-Quanzhou districts of southern Fujian. The terms “Southern Min” or “Minnan” 閩南 as used in China can have a wider meaning encompassing related languages that not only includes the Zhangzhou-Quanzhou group of languages, but also Teochew and Hainanese (Zhou 2010: 1).

factor to the divergence is Penangites' creative compounding of pre-existing Hokkien vocabulary in ways unknown to speakers of other varieties. The following describes both the historical context of this divergence in vocabulary, and examples of Penang Hokkien speakers' neologisms arranged according to some general categories.

Despite the name, "Penang Hokkien" as employed in this chapter refers not only to varieties of Hokkien spoken within the state of Penang, but also to closely related varieties spoken by the majority of Malaysian ethnic Chinese in the cities and towns along the west coast of the Malay Peninsula, from the north of Kuala Kangsar to the Thai border. Because of its geographical spread, Penang Hokkien is also sometimes known as Northern Malaysian Hokkien. This serves to distinguish it from the "Southern Malaysian Hokkien" spoken in the southern half of the Malay Peninsula and in Singapore, which is phonologically and grammatically different from the Northern variety.

Yet other more distantly-related varieties can be found further afield, in Northern Borneo (Sarawak), Northern Sumatra (Medan) and Southern Thailand (Phuket), and a related variety was also once spoken in the Chinatown of Rangoon. However, within Malaysia, Penang remains the most important centre for this language and was historically the centre from which it spread to other areas along the coast. Penang Hokkien has been the lingua franca of ethnic Chinese in northern Malaysia for over a century, but at present appears to be undergoing replacement by Mandarin as a result of longstanding education policies and changes in the home linguistic environment (Sim 2012; Ooi & Tan 2017).

Penang Hokkien is based on the Haicheng 海澄 dialect of the Zhang-Quan 漳泉 subgroup of Southern Min languages, reflecting the speech of the homeland of the majority of the earliest Hokkien settler families prior to the middle of the nineteenth century (Jones 2009). However, intense contact with other languages, principally Malay, English, Cantonese, and Teochew, has significantly altered the vocabulary, tonal system, and syntactic structure of the base dialect to a greater or lesser degree that varies in accordance with a speaker's social network, age, and family and educational backgrounds (see Lim & Teoh 2007; Lim 2010; Chuang et al. 2013; Soon 2014; Ye 2014; Churchman 2017; Hing 2017). The divergent development of all of these linguistic features in Penang Hokkien frequently impedes mutual intelligibility with Taiwanese and mainland Chinese varieties.

As the most immediately obvious difference between Penang Hokkien and other varieties, it is lexical borrowings from Malay that attracts the most scholarly and popular attention. Social media discourse around the language often revolves around such words, the perennial favourites being *lui* 鑊 for 'money'

and *sah-bûn* 雪文 for ‘soap’ and their supposed derivations.³ However, lexical borrowing is only one of the factors behind the distinctive character of Penang Hokkien vocabulary, as a substantial amount of vocabulary difference between Penang and other varieties originates in different usages of native Hokkien vocabulary. One category of divergent usages is the retention in Penang of a number of words that have fallen out of use in other varieties. Two common examples are *chít-chûi* 一誰 for ‘who’ – used in the Hokkien translation of the Old Testament completed in 1884 – and *thiⁿ-sî* 天時 for ‘weather’, both current in Penang but already obsolete in Taiwan and Amoy usage (the latter is known in Singapore). A further factor, much understudied and the subject of this chapter,⁴ is the rich vocabulary of neologisms that speakers of Penang Hokkien have derived through compounding and semantic extension of the elements shared with other varieties of Hokkien. These words, although derived from native Hokkien elements, are mostly unknown in the Hokkien-speaking world beyond Malaysia and Singapore and are generally not understood by Taiwanese or Amoy speakers of Hokkien.

Such neologisms can be categorized into two broad categories. The first includes words for things that speakers encountered in the multicultural, tropical environment of the Straits Settlements that were rarely encountered by or unknown to speakers of Hokkien in nineteenth-century Fujian, including types of clothing, building styles, foods, fruits, religious practices, customs, and colonial political or administrative institutions. The second category consists of words for the new technology and ideas that appeared in industrialized societies of the twentieth century. These were commonly encountered in all parts of the Hokkien-speaking world, but were invented or came into existence at a time in which the Penang Hokkien speech community was relatively isolated from other Hokkien speech communities. Over the last ten years I have been collecting these distinctive terms from conversations on the street, internet forums, the weekly Penang Hokkien Podcast, and a collection of published dictionaries and manuals of the language (Tan 2001; 2008; 2010; Kwok 2005; Lee Eng Kew 2007; de Gijzel 2013; Tan: 2016). I am also extremely grateful for the help of Sim Lee, Ooi Kee How, Simon Chee Hooi Lim, Khoo Salma, Tina Teoh and Alan Ong for making me aware of many of these special terms.

3 The former comes from Dutch *duit* via Malay and the latter either from Arabic or Portuguese *sabun*. These and subsequent Malay etymologies are from Jones (2007).

4 Wu (2014) appears to be the only pre-existing academic study of such words in Penang. Gao (2000) has made a list of unique native terms in the closely-related dialect of Medan and Zhou and Zhou (2000: 89–90) provide a short list of neologisms in Singapore Hokkien.

2 The Development of New Vocabulary in Chinese Languages

The last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth were an important time for the development of Modern Standard Chinese vocabulary. As Chinese began to take an interest in the technology, culture, and governmental systems of Western countries, hundreds of new words were created and imported into written Chinese, and from there made their way into the spoken vernacular languages of those literate in Chinese (including Vietnamese and Korean). Beginning in the 1840s, Chinese intellectuals created new Chinese compound words they came across in Western books, and after the 1860s principally on the models provided by Japanese *kanji* compounds coined by Japanese writers, as Meiji Period Japan (1868–1912) quickly became a model for China of a successfully modernized, strong Asian nation (see Masini 1993). New terms in Chinese included words such as *mínzhu* ‘democracy’ (appearing first in Chinese in 1864), *zongjiao* ‘religion’ (1890), *kexue* ‘science’ (1896), and *dianbao* (1860s) ‘telegraphy’, based on Japanese *minshu* 民主, *shūkyō* 宗教, *kagaku* 科學, and *denpō* 電報. These words eventually found their way into the spoken Chinese vernacular languages, and formed an important part of the vocabulary of the National Language (*Guoyu* 國語) based on the Peking dialect, promoted from the 1920s onward. Many words invented or borrowed into written Chinese over this period found their way into spoken Hokkien through the media and the education system. In the preface to his 1923 supplement to Carstairs Douglas’ Hokkien dictionary of 1873, Thomas Barclay describes the changes in Hokkien vocabulary of the preceding half-century as follows:

Western civilization, to an increasing extent, has been welcomed, and new ideas in every department of thought and action have filled the minds of the people. These new ideas have demanded for their expression new terms, the addition of which has much enriched and extended the language.

BARCLAY 1923: i

Barclay’s supplement added 271 pages of entries to Douglas’ original 617 pages, an increase somewhere between a third to a half of new vocabulary. Hokkien speakers on Taiwan during the Japanese colonial period (1895–1945) were exposed directly to newly coined Japanese vocabulary through the Japanese education system, and borrowed words like *iá-kiū* 野球 ‘baseball’, *kháu-chō*

口座 'bank account', and *pēⁿ-īⁿ* 病院 'hospital' – that were modelled directly on Japanese *yakyū*, *kōza*, and *byōin* – entered the Taiwanese Hokkien vernacular but were not adopted in written Chinese. After 1945, the exclusion of languages other than Mandarin from the education system in Taiwan intensified the influence of Mandarin on Taiwanese Hokkien, with the result that many vernacular Taiwanese expressions were replaced by their Mandarin equivalents pronounced according to Hokkien, such as the replacement of the native Taiwanese *chò-sit-lâng* 做穡農 'farmer' with the Mandarinized term *lông-bîn* 農民 (Cheng 1987). Similar changes occurred in the Hokkien spoken in China. Li and Xu (2007) analyse changes in Amoy dialect vocabulary over a century as illustrated through Amoy dialect textbooks, noting not only changes in material and social culture as reasons for vocabulary change, but also the strong influence of Mandarin vocabulary, especially from the mid-twentieth century onwards.

During this period of rapid change in the vocabulary of Chinese languages, three factors combined to encourage Penang Hokkien to develop divergently from other varieties. The first and most basic factor was the disconnect between spoken Hokkien and forms of written Chinese, exacerbated in Penang by the heavy admixture of Malay, English, and other languages. The second was historically low levels of literacy amongst the Penang Hokkien speech community in written Chinese or proficiency in Mandarin, the two media through which neologisms entered other varieties of Hokkien. The third factor was the almost complete lack of exposure to other varieties of Hokkien and the relegation of Penang Hokkien to the home, the family, and everyday societal interactions. Until the late 1980s, little was published in Hokkien worldwide aside from a few textbooks and missionary texts, let alone in Penang Hokkien, nor was there much in the way of news media throughout most of the twentieth century to carry new vocabulary current in Chinese or Taiwanese Hokkien to the ears of Penang Hokkien speakers. These three factors are explained in more detail below.

Until relatively recent attempts at standardization by the ROC Ministry of Education, spoken varieties of Hokkien have historically maintained only a loose relationship with the Chinese written character. In pre-twentieth century texts, character usage was largely unsystematized (see Klöter 2005: 41–87 for details) and the Literary Chinese used in the education system and as the official written language of the ROC until 1919 presented extra problems for Hokkien speakers on account of its pronunciation being significantly different from what they used in their everyday vernacular. Writing about Chinese

education in Malacca in 1839, Newbold quotes a report on a Chinese native school in Malacca describing the difficulties faced by those learning to read and write through Hokkien as follows:

In schools among the Fokien people, the practice of committing much to memory is not attended with so much benefit as might be expected, from the circumstance of their colloquial dialect being entirely different from that in which they read and learn; insomuch, that though persons may be well acquainted with the colloquial dialect, yet the dialect in which they read is so different, that much may be committed to memory without being understood. This forms a great barrier to improvement in Fokien schools, as the scholars have two dialects to acquire before they can understand or make themselves intelligible to others. The same is the case in Canton schools.

NEWBOLD 1839, vol. 1: 177

The “two dialects” in this case most likely refers to the difference between Literary Chinese and the colloquial vernacular. Both vernacular Cantonese and Hokkien differ greatly in grammar and vocabulary from Literary Chinese. However, for Cantonese speakers the reading pronunciation of texts and the pronunciation of the related morphemes in the spoken vernacular is largely identical, and it is only the word choice and grammatical idiom that distinguishes it from the literary style (see also Ding, this volume). For a Cantonese speaker, ‘meat’, ‘person’, and ‘water’ are pronounced *yuk* 肉, *yan* 人, and *sui* 水, no matter whether they are spoken or read off the page of a Chinese book. In contrast, a Hokkien speaker will use *bah*, *lâng*, and *chúi* when speaking, but when reading out from a page of Literary Chinese, read the Chinese characters out as *jiók*, *jîn*, and *súi*. It has been estimated that 33% of commonly used characters for written Taiwanese (that is, the written representation of the spoken vernacular) have a double reading, or more accurately, one character stands for what would be two separate morphemes in a phonetic script (Xu 2000: 62). This added an extra layer of complexity to an already complicated and ineffective language learning process. The result was that the literacy rate in Fujian was especially low. Edwin Joshua Dukes, a missionary who lived in southern Fujian in the 1880s describes it the lowest in the country:

In the northerly provinces, where the Mandarin language is read and spoken, the proportion of readers is higher than in the south, where the dialects and languages are so numerous, and the written language coincides so little with the market tongues. The most deplorably ignorant

province is Fu-kien. Intelligent and judicious colporteurs in that province have assured the writer that only one or two percent can read with sufficient hope that if they received the scriptures their own eyes could convey the meaning to their eyes and hearts.

DUKES 1885: 166–67

Newbold noted that in Malacca, Chinese tended to intermarry with Malays, and that the Malay language became the home language and the one acquired by children “to whom the later acquirement of Chinese must become a matter of time and difficulty” (Newbold 1839, vol. 1: 172). Later he notes that although Chinese from China were generally literate, “of those born in Malacca ... probably not one in ten (though they have been at school several years) is able to understand books written in the plainest style” (ibid. 179–80).

Learning to read Chinese, already an onerous task for a Hokkien speaker, was further compounded in Penang by the fact that many Malay terms and a certain number of Malay syntactic features had entered the language, especially that of the Baba families (Lim & Teoh 2007, Lim 2010). In the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, many Straits-born Chinese in Penang spoke Malay as their mother tongue rather than Hokkien. In 1913, William Shellabear refers to Baba Malay (a creolized form of Malay with a Hokkien substrate; see Aye in this volume) as “the mother-tongue of the majority of the Chinese women and children in the Straits Settlements”, and “the language of the homes of the Straits-born Chinese – the most highly educated and most influential section of the Chinese community in the British possessions” (Shellabear 1913: 52). Judging by the popularity of the Malay translations of “Batu Gantong” – the pen-name of Chan Kim Boon 曾錦文 (1851–1920) – Chinese who could speak Hokkien were more comfortable reading and writing in Malay or English than any form of written Chinese, and wrote fan letters to him in both of these languages. One of them, named Lim Tiouw Chuan from Taiping, recommended his *Sam Kok* 三國 as a work “that should be in every Chinese home” (Batu Gantong 1892, vol. 5: iii–iv). Unlike many of his readers, Chan himself was a proficient reader of Chinese who had spent some years in Fujian, and his works contained glossaries of difficult or obscure Hokkien vocabulary explained in English and vernacular Malay.

Further complexity was added as a wave of migration of Chinese from China (known as the *Sinkhek* 新客; lit. ‘new guests’), beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, brought Chinese speaking other languages such as Cantonese and Teochew who introduced many features of their own native tongues into the Penang Hokkien. Throughout this period, English was the language of colonial administration and higher education, which resulted in

English vocabulary and syntactic features entering the language, particularly from the mid-twentieth century onwards (Churchman 2017). Amidst these diverse origins of the Penang Hokkien vernacular, even a Penang Hokkien speaker who was a proficient reader and writer of Classical Chinese or Mandarin would be at a loss how to turn their everyday Hokkien vernacular to a written form in Chinese characters. Consequently, until the rise of interest in vernacular Penang Hokkien beginning in the early 2000s, written representations of the spoken vernacular were rare and limited to a few wordlists, mentions and descriptions. Two notable examples are Lo Man Yuk's *Chinese Names of Streets in Penang* that provides a snapshot of vernacular vocabulary at the turn of the twentieth century (Lo 1900), and the Hokkien-Malay glosses contained in the Baba Malay translations of Chinese classic novels by Batu Gantong over three decades of the 1890s to the 1910s.⁵ Both of these writers used romanized forms of Hokkien accompanied by what they considered to be the appropriate Chinese characters.

Hou Hongjian's 侯鴻鑒 *A Record of Travel in the Nanyang*, published in 1920, offers a snapshot of Chinese language education in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Hou recounted his discussions with the headmasters of Chinese schools in Penang in October 1919, in which he was informed that there were twenty Chinese primary schools in Penang, fifteen boys' schools and five girls' schools, but that only five of these had rolls of more than 100 pupils, the Chunghwa Confucian School 孔聖廟中華民國型中學 boasting the highest roll of over 400 pupils (Hou 1920, vol. 2: 30a). Hou noted that in the Chunghwa School taught the first two years in Hokkien before switching to the "National Language" (Mandarin) in the third and fourth years (ibid., vol. 2: 31b.). Founded by the local business magnate Cheong Fatt Tze 張弼士 in 1904, this school was the first to use Mandarin as the medium of education but was likely teaching literacy in Classical Chinese rather than Vernacular Chinese (白話 *Baihua*) – a written form based on northern Chinese – as the written standard.

The Republican government in China began to popularize *Baihua* as the standard written form of Chinese from the 1920s onwards, and this began to filter into the Chinese education system in Penang (also see Hoogervorst, this volume, on Indonesia). Although it is not clear when various Chinese-medium schools in Penang shifted to the new form, the Chinese newspaper *Penang Sin Poe* 檳城新報, published from 1895 to 1941, gradually switched from Classical Chinese to Mandarin over the period from 1928 to 1930. This at least indicates

5 Two of the most notable translations being his *Sam Kok* 三國 (Luo Guanzhong's 羅貫中 *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* published from 1892–96) and *Kow Chey Thian* 猴齊天 (Wu Cheng'en's 吳承恩 *The Journey to the West* published from 1911–13).

that the new style of reading and writing had become widespread by this time among those literate in Chinese. Although the adoption of *Baihua* reduced the distance between written Chinese and all of the spoken Sinitic languages to some extent, the distance between the structure and vocabulary of written Mandarin and that of spoken Penang Hokkien would still have constituted a considerable hurdle to Hokkien speakers' ability to relate what they had learnt to write in Mandarin back to their everyday language.

The total Chinese population of Penang in the year following Hou's visit was 135,288, and that of Hokkiens 64,085. Although it is impossible to calculate the number of proficient Chinese readers and writers in Penang, Hou's estimation from 1919 indicates that at the most, around 2,000 children were attending schools in which they could acquire any kind of Chinese literacy, and that this was a relatively new phenomenon. In Penang of the pre-War period, there were many people who had had no chance to attend schooling of any kind, and those who did often attended only for a few years or attended English-medium schools. In addition, Penang Hokkien speakers often had to use Malay or English for social interactions and for official purposes and in higher education. They read Malay and English newspapers and books.

Popular entertainment in other varieties of Hokkien could have acted as a conduit in introducing new words from these varieties to Penang speakers, but such entertainment was not widely available to them. Entertainment in Cantonese and Mandarin was easily available in Malaysia from the 1980s onwards, but Penang Hokkien speakers had relatively little exposure to entertainment and news in any variety of Hokkien until as late as the mid-2000s. Ten-minute nightly news broadcasts in Hokkien were and continue to be broadcast nationally, but these have always been made in the Amoy dialect that is far removed from what is spoken in Penang. This changed in 2007 with Taiwanese programming through satellite TV, such as *Hua Hee Dai* 歡喜台 started in 2007, or through sites such as Youtube.⁶

Therefore, during the period in which the vocabulary of written Chinese – and hence, other varieties of Hokkien – was in a state of flux, the disconnect between written Chinese and spoken Hokkien, the limited spread of education in written Chinese, and intense contact with English and Malay affecting mutual intelligibility with other varieties all combined to insulate the majority of Penang Hokkien speakers from the major developments in Hokkien vocabulary in other parts of the Hokkien-speaking world well into the twenty-first century. The result of these combined factors was that speakers of Penang

6 For more on the recent sociolinguistic situation of Chinese languages in Malaysia, see Sim (2012).

Hokkien were insulated from the trend of adopting words into Hokkien via graphic loans from Mandarin and instead derived original neologisms from their own everyday spoken language through compounding and semantic extension of pre-existing words. The vocabulary of Penang Hokkien therefore developed along a different trajectory from other varieties.

3 Vocabulary Innovation by Compounding

As Penang Hokkien compounds are derived from putting together common pre-existing words, they are more transparent in meaning to speakers than those borrowed from written Chinese in other varieties of Hokkien. Often in Literary Chinese, a single syllable will represent an idea but is only used as a bound morpheme, and unless one is familiar with its meaning and how it is used in other words, its meaning will be opaque. For instance, some of the examples in Table 5.1 relating to uniforms use the common morpheme *saⁿ* 衫 ‘shirt’ for clothing in preference to *hók* 服 used in other varieties. As *hók* 服 appears only in the colloquial Penang Hokkien word *hók-sāi* 服侍, meaning ‘to serve’ or ‘to worship’, and not in words related to clothing, it did not occur to Hokkien-speaking Penangites when they came to derive words for uniforms.

Where Mandarin (and consequently Amoy Hokkien and Taiwanese due to their exposure to Mandarin) use two or three-character compounds to create concrete nouns, Penang Hokkien, lacking some of the syllabic morphemes transmitted through written Chinese, often prefers multisyllabic transparent compounds in which the sense of the word is immediately deducible from its constituent parts. Some terms are derived with the nominalizing particle *ê* 个 and are either short noun phrases containing subordinate clauses or possessive noun phrases (see Table 5.1). When referring to occupations, Penang Hokkien can derive a noun phrase from a verb object phrase with the addition of – *ê* “one who ...”. However, these are often avoided in preference to short sentences expressing the same concept, for example “I am a civil servant” would be expressed as *Wá chò cheng-hú-kang* 我做政府工, literally meaning ‘I do government work’.

A number of very basic words are expressed differently in Penang Hokkien from other varieties of Hokkien. These single Penang words often cover a broader range of meanings than those in other varieties, which distinguish them with distinct terms. When these words are used as components in compound words, the meanings are often unclear to speakers of other varieties (Table 5.2).

TABLE 5.1 Transparent multisyllabic compounds

English meaning	Penang	Translation of Penang expression	Amoy/ Taiwan ^a	Mandarin
army uniform	<i>peng--ê-saⁿ</i> 兵个衫	‘the clothes of soldiers’	<i>kun-hók</i> 軍服	<i>junfu</i> 軍服
chopstick holder	<i>hê-tū--ê</i> (<i>mih-kiàⁿ</i>) 下箸个(物件)	‘the thing to put chopsticks in’	<i>tī-lāng</i> 箸籠	<i>kuaizitong</i> 筷子筒
civil servant	<i>chò chêng-hú-kang--ê</i> 做政府工个	‘someone who works for the government’	<i>kong-bū-oân</i> 公務員	<i>gongwuyuan</i> 公務員
dentist	<i>pó--chhùi-khí--ê</i> 補喙齒个	‘someone who does fillings’	<i>gê-i</i> 牙醫	<i>yayi</i> 牙醫
fire extinguisher	<i>kiù-hóe--ê</i> <i>mih-kiàⁿ</i> 救火个物件	‘the thing that rescues from fires’	<i>biát-hóe-khì</i> 滅火器	<i>miehuoqi</i> 滅火器
ritual implements	<i>pài Hút--ê</i> <i>mih-kiàⁿ</i> 拜佛个物件	‘things for worshipping the Buddha’	<i>hoat-khì</i> 法器	<i>faqì</i> 法器
school uniform	<i>óh-tâng-(ê)-saⁿ</i> 學堂衫	‘the clothes for school’	<i>hāu-hók</i> 校服	<i>xiaofu</i> 校服
veterinarian	<i>khîm-siù--ê</i> <i>ló-kun</i> 禽獸个 老君 ^b	‘doctor for animals’	<i>siū-i</i> 獸醫	<i>shouyi</i> 獸醫

a The examples for Amoy and Taiwan in this table and those following have been cross-checked through the *Maryknoll English-Taiwanese Dictionary* (Maryknoll 2013), the *Minnan fangyan dacidian* (Zhou 2006), and the *Minnanhua Zhangqiang cidian* (Chen 2006).

b *Khîm-siù* 禽獸 for ‘animal’ is obsolete in most other varieties or restricted to the meaning ‘birds and beasts’, having been replaced by the Japanese coinage *tōng-bút* 動物. *Ló-kun* 老君, the default term for ‘doctor’, is in fact the Malay loan *dukun*. This old term for a medicine man or medicine woman is disguised with the Chinese characters for ‘elderly lord’, the name of a Taoist deity.

TABLE 5.2 Differences in base morphemes

English	Penang Hokkien	Taiwan/Amoy	Meaning of Penang term in other varieties
certificate	<i>jī</i> 字	<i>chèng-bêng-su</i> 證明書, <i>jī</i> 字, <i>jī-bú</i> 字母	Chinese character, written word
deity, idol, divine	<i>ang-kong</i> 尪公	<i>sîn</i> 神, <i>sîn-bêng</i> 神明, <i>sîn-siōng</i> 神像	idol, doll
film, movie, TV programme	<i>hì</i> 戲 ^a	<i>tiān-iaⁿ</i> 電影, <i>chiat-bók</i> 節目	a play
food, cuisine	<i>chiáh</i> 食	chhài 菜, liáu-lí 料理, chhan 餐	to eat, consume
temple, building for religious worship, monastery	<i>am</i> 庵	<i>biō</i> 廟, <i>sī</i> 寺, ^b <i>am</i> 庵	Buddhist monastery, nunnery
tree, plant	<i>châng</i> 欖	<i>chhiū-á</i> 樹仔, <i>chhiū-châng</i> 樹欖, <i>sít-bút</i> 植物	measure word for plants

- a *Tiān-iaⁿ-hì* 電影戲 is another older way of referring to a film, but the shorter form is more common.
- b Both of these terms are included in the names of temples in Penang, for example *Kék-Lók-Sī* 極樂寺, the famous Buddhist temple in Air Itam, and *Chôa-Biō* 蛇廟, the Snake Temple at Bayan Lepas. The word *biō* 廟 on its own is not unknown, however a Penang Hokkien speaker would tend to describe these collectively as *am* 庵.

The element *am* 庵 has the extended meaning of any large building used for religious worship, with the exception of Christian churches. Its derived compounds include *Hoan-á-am* 番仔庵 ‘a Mosque’ (lit. Malay-*am*) – also *hôe-kàu-tng* 回教堂 or *hôe-kàu-biō* 回教廟 – *Siām-Hút-am* 暹佛庵 ‘Siam Buddha-temple’ for a Thai wat,⁷ *Bâng-gà-lí am* 芒加里庵⁸ (lit. ‘Bengali temple’) for a Sikh temple, and *Kè-lêng-á-am* 吉寧仔庵 for a Hindu temple.

The word *ang-kong* 尪公 referred to a doll or idol, or the statue or sculpture of a deity, and these are the principal meanings it retains in other varieties of Hokkien. However, in Penang and northern Malaysia, although the original

7 Even though Thailand has not used the name “Siam” for almost seventy years, it still leads a vigorous existence in Penang as the default term, where other varieties of Hokkien have adopted *Thài* 泰.

8 *Bâng-gà-lí* 芒加里 derives erroneously from *Bengali*.

meaning is still retained in some expressions,⁹ it has come to refer to the deities themselves, rather than their representations in stone and clay. Without further qualification, the word mainly refers to deities worshipped by the Chinese, but with the addition of the ethnic prefix *Kè-lêng-á* 吉寧仔, it may also refer to Hindu deities. The gods of monotheistic religions are seldom referred to in this fashion, presumably because they seldom are represented with statues. Sikhism is exceptional, and Sikhs are said to worship *Bâng-gà-lí ang-kong* 芒加里𠵿公 ‘Bengali gods’. Larger Taoist temples are named *ang-kong-am* 𠵿公庵;¹⁰ these are administered by groups known as *ang-kong-hōe* 𠵿公會 ‘god clubs’. Small temples or residential houses that double up as places of worship are known as *ang-kong-keng* 𠵿公間. The birthdays of Chinese deities according to the Lunar calendar are known as *ang-kong-se*.ⁿ 𠵿公生 ‘god’s birthday’ and special sacrifices are made to them on such days. Talismans or good luck charms thought to be blessed by a god are known as *ang-kong-hû* 𠵿公符 ‘divine talismans’ or sometimes just as *hû*. Lucky numbers received in a dream or received from a shaman are known as *ang-kong-jī* 𠵿公字 ‘divine characters’ and used for gambling and fortune-telling purposes.

In other varieties of Hokkien, *châng* 欖 is a measure word or numerical coefficient for trees and plants. In other varieties, it is termed *chhiū* 樹 or *chhiū-bók* 樹木. The Penang usage for ‘tree’ probably derives from an older word *chhiū-châng* 樹欖, meaning a bush or shrub, which Penangites still sometimes use as the word for tree. In compounding, Penang Hokkien takes the final syllable of this words and uses it as a general term for all types of bushes, shrubs, plants and trees, whatever their size. Thus, a coconut palm is a *iâ-châng* 椰欖, bamboo is *tek-châng* 竹欖, a banana tree is a *keng-chio-châng* 弓蕉欖, a rambutan tree is *âng-mô-tan-châng* 紅毛丹欖, a coffee plant is a *ko-pì-châng* 嗱呷欖, and a rubber plant is *chhiū-leng-châng* 樹朥欖.

Hì 戲 originally referred to traditional theatre performances and the stage on which these are performed, and in other varieties it still retains this meaning. In Penang, however, this is the ordinary word for a film or TV programme. For the traditional type of outdoor theatre performances, the Malay loan *way-ang* is also used. Therefore, *khòaⁿ-hì* 看戲 refers to watching a movie or TV programme, rather than attending a theatre performance as it would in other varieties. An *Âng-mô-hì* 紅毛戲 ‘red-hair film’ is a Hollywood movie or a

9 In Penang, this meaning is retained with the diminutive suffix *á* 仔 and can be found in compound terms such as *ang-kong-á* 𠵿公仔 ‘a doll, a figurine, or a picture of a character or a face’ and *ang-kong-á-piáⁿ* 𠵿公仔餅 ‘small cakes shaped like an animal or with a picture of an animal on them made and eaten during the Mid-Autumn festival’, also known as mascot mooncakes.

10 A less commonly used alternative is *ang-kong-biō* 𠵿公廟.

movie from a Western country, whereas a *kúi-hì* 鬼戲 ‘ghost film’ is a horror film. To make or film a movie is to *hip-hì* 翕戲 ‘to take a film’, modelled on *hip siàu-éng* 翕相影 ‘to take a photo’, and to download one from the internet – a more recent term, indicating that Penang Hokkien is still capable of this type of invention – is to *lòh-hì* 落戲 ‘to make a film come down’. *Hì-tái* 戲臺 generally refers to a cinema in Penang, whereas in other varieties it usually means a theatre or stage.

In addition to its original meaning of ‘a letter, word, or written character’, *jī* 字 has the additional meaning of ‘a certificate or official document’ that is absent from modern Taiwanese or Amoy usage. Thus, a birth certificate is a *chhut-se.ⁿ-jī* 出生字,¹¹ a death certificate is *sí-lâng-jī* 死儂字 ‘dead person certificate’, and a *koa-sa-jī* 呷吵字 is a will or document of power of attorney, the first part of which is borrowed from Malay *kuasa* ‘power’.

Chiáh 食, aside from the meaning ‘to eat’ known in other varieties of Hokkien, has an additional function in Penang as a noun indicating different types of ethnic cuisine or dishes, and replaces a number of terms in other varieties of Hokkien. *Âng-mô-chiáh* 紅毛食 is a general term for Western food, *Hoan-á-chiáh* 番仔食 refers to Malay food (*nasi Melayu*), Chinese food is *Tng-lâng-chiáh* 唐儂食, and *Siam-chiáh* 暹食 refers to Thai food. This way of distinguishing Chinese, Western, Malay, and Indian food is just one example of a very large class of compounds in Penang Hokkien associated with the four main ethnic groups that the speakers of the language distinguished in their daily life, as will be discussed in the next section.

4 “Ethnic” Compounding Prefixes *Âng-mô*, *Tng-lâng*, *Hoan-ná*, and *Kè-lêng-á*

Prior to the nineteenth century, things the Chinese saw or knew to be foreign imports were prefixed variously with 胡 (*hu*), 洋 (*yang*), 番 (*fan*) and so on, to indicate their foreignness. Once used in this manner, they no longer counted as adjectives, but were fixed as part of the word (Masini 1993: 124–25). As a result of being spoken in a multicultural society, Penang Hokkien has created many different words for the social and material cultures they encountered through prefixing them in different ways, depending on which groups they perceived them to be associated with. Marked categories of the “foreign” are subdivided into *Âng-mô* 紅毛 ‘Western’, *Hoan-á* 番仔 ‘Malay’, and *Kè-lêng-á* 吉寧仔 ‘Indian’, with an additional prefix *Tng-lâng* 唐儂 for Chinese things that

¹¹ An alternative form is *chhut-se.ⁿ-chóa* 出生紙 ‘birth paper’.

were the once the norm, but in a multicultural context require a prefix to mark them out as specifically Chinese.¹² The preceding four terms are known in the geographically close varieties spoken in Singapore and Medan, but Penang Hokkien has been especially creative in using them for derived compounds.

The term *Âng-mô* 紅毛 'red-hair' is both the general term for Westerners or Europeans, but also has a narrower meaning that refers specifically to English-speaking peoples. The word was once in widespread usage throughout East and Southeast Asia, where it generally meant either Dutch or English people depending on the colonial context (see Ding, this volume). The term is still well-known in Singapore, even in the local variety of English, and is also used in Thai and Cambodian Teochew, and its cognates are used in Borneo Hakka. *Âng-mô* has a wide range of uses in Penang for compounding unparalleled in other varieties.¹³ *Âng-mô* was already very widely used for compounding by 1900. Lo Man Yuk records seven names that use it, including *Âng-mô-kong-koan* 紅毛公館 'town hall', the *Âng-mô-tōa-lé-pài-tîg* 紅毛大禮拜堂 'St. George's church', and *Âng-mô-ôh* 紅毛學 'Penang Free School'.

Compounds relating to people of English or Western ethnic background include *Âng-mô-kiá*ⁿ 紅毛囡 'red-hair children' for Western children, *Âng-mô-cha-bó* 紅毛查某 'a Western woman', *Âng-mô-pô* 紅毛婆 'red-hair wife' as a slightly derogatory term for a Western woman, and *Âng-mô-kâu* 紅毛猴 'red-haired monkey' as a not particularly polite way of referring to a Western man. To be or do something *âng-mô-khóan* 紅毛款 'red-hair-style' is a Western way or style of doing something. As the language typically spoken by the type of Westerners with whom the Penang Chinese had the most frequent intercourse, *Âng-mô* has the extended meaning of the English language as spoken or written (in Medan Hokkien it often referred to Dutch). *Âng-mô-sái* 紅毛屎 'red-hair shit' derives from the longer expression *chiáh-âng-mô-sái* 食紅毛屎 'to eat the red-hair shit', the literal meaning of which is to receive an English education. The short form is used as a noun to refer to someone educated in an English-medium school who knows no written Chinese, and is frequently employed jocularly or in a self-deprecatory manner.

12 For example *saⁿ* 衫 is the general term for clothing, and *Tîg-lâng-saⁿ* 唐儂衫 now refers to traditional Chinese clothing such as cheongsams. At some point in the past, when Chinese styles of dress were the norm, Western clothing would presumably have been *Âng-mô-saⁿ* 紅毛衫.

13 A significant number of these terms existed in mid-century Malayan Cantonese as well (see Bruce 1954: 122), but these are seldom used nowadays. A few of these words still exist other varieties of Hokkien: *âng-mô-thó* 紅毛土 (Taiwan) or *âng-mô-thó* 紅毛灰 (China) for 'cement' and *âng-mô-tan* 紅毛丹 for 'rambutan' (see also Ding, this volume).

Another use of *âng-mô* 紅毛 is as a prefix is used to mark things or concepts associated with Western or colonial culture, often in contrast to their perceived equivalents in Chinese culture (Table 5.3). Sometimes these are used only when a distinction needs to be made, for example *âng-mô--chhit-goéh* 紅毛七月 'red-hair seventh month' is July only when it needs to be disambiguated from the seventh month of the Chinese lunar calendar. *Âng-mô--tang-cheh* 紅毛冬節 'red-hair's Winter Solstice', a common word for Christmas, is formed on analogy with the Chinese festival of *Tang-cheh* 冬節 'Winter Solstice', because the two festivals are only four days apart.¹⁴ However, the term for All Souls' Day, *âng-mô--chheng-bêng* 紅毛清明, is named after the tomb Sweeping Day or the *Chheng-bêng* 清明 festival, not because of the similar date, but because both are festivals at which the dead are remembered.

TABLE 5.3 Compounds with *Âng-mô* 'Westerner'

English	Penang Hokkien	Meaning of Penang term in other varieties	Amoy/Taiwan equivalent
All Souls' Day	<i>âng-mô--chheng-bêng</i> 紅毛清明	red-hair tomb-sweeping day	<i>tui-su í-bông-jít</i> 追思已亡日
Arabic numerals (as opposed to those in Chinese characters)	<i>âng-mô--hō-bé</i> 紅毛號碼	red-hair numbers	<i>A-la-pek sò-jī</i> 阿拉伯數字
botanical gardens	<i>âng-mô--hoa-huîⁿ</i> 紅毛花園	red-hair flower garden	<i>sít-bút-hng</i> 植物園
British army; British soldiers	<i>âng-mô--peng</i> 紅毛兵	red-hair soldiers	<i>Eng-kun</i> 英軍
British colonial period	<i>âng-mô--chhiú</i> 紅毛手	red-hair hand	<i>Eng-kok sit-bîn--ê sí-tài</i> 英國殖民時代
bungalow	<i>âng-mô--lâu</i> 紅毛樓	red-hair building	(no exact translation)
Christmas	<i>âng-mô--tang-cheh</i> 紅毛冬節	red-hair winter solstice	<i>Sèng-tàn</i> 聖誕, <i>Sèng-tàn-chiat</i> 聖誕節

14 Alternatives are *Ia-So-se.ⁿ* 耶穌生 'Jesus' birthday' and *Hōng-kàu-se.ⁿ* 奉教生 'Catholicism birthday'.

TABLE 5.3 Compounds with *Âng-mô* ‘Westerner’ (cont.)

English	Penang Hokkien	Meaning of Penang term in other varieties	Amoy/Taiwan equivalent
English first name (either official or unofficial, used in addition to or in place of one's Chinese name)	<i>âng-mô-miâ</i> 紅毛名	red-hair name	<i>Eng-bûn-miâ</i> 英文名
English language	<i>âng-mô-(-ōa)</i> 紅毛(話)	red-hair language	<i>Eng-gú ~ Eng-gí</i> 英語
Roman alphabet, Roman letters, written English	<i>âng-mô-jī</i> 紅毛字	red-hair characters	<i>Lô-má-jī</i> 羅馬字, <i>Peng-im</i> 拼音, <i>Eng-bûn</i> 英文
solar calendar (New Year beginning on 1 January)	<i>âng-mô-chiaⁿ</i> 紅毛正	red-hair first month	<i>goân-tàn</i> 元旦 (Amoy), <i>sin-nî</i> 新年 (Taiwan)
solar calendar year	<i>âng-mô-nî</i> 紅毛年 (also used in Singapore)	red-hair year	<i>iông-lék-nî</i> 陽曆年
sweets	<i>âng-mô-thûg</i> 紅毛糖	red-hair sugar	<i>thûg-á</i> 糖仔, <i>thûg-kó</i> 糖果
tomato	<i>âng-mô-kiô</i> 紅毛茄	red-hair brinjal	<i>tho-ma-toh</i> (Taiwan), <i>chhàu-khī-á</i> 臭柿仔 (Amoy)
Western age (when it needs to be disambiguated for official purposes from the Chinese age that adds an extra year)	<i>âng-mô-hòe</i> 紅毛歲	red-hair years	
Westerner, white foreigner; the English language, English as a school subject	<i>âng-mô</i> 紅毛 (also used in Singapore)	red hair	<i>gōa-kok-lâng</i> 外國人, <i>a-tok-á</i> 阿啄仔 (Taiwan), <i>hoan-á</i> 番仔 (Amoy), <i>Eng-gú</i> 英語, <i>Eng-bûn</i> 英文

The last four terms are connected specifically to things associated with the British colonial period and require some historical context. *Âng-mô-lâu* 紅毛樓 ‘red-hair building’ refers to the kind of luxurious bungalow that Westerners owned and lived in in colonial times, and does not correspond neatly to any term in Taiwanese or Amoy Hokkien. The word is also used in a jocular sense as a term for a bump on the head received from a blow. *Âng-mô-hoa-huân* 紅毛花園 ‘the red-hairs’ garden’ originally referred specifically to the Botanical Gardens at Air Itam, but through association this term ended up being used by Penangites overseas to translate the English names for any botanical gardens. *Âng-mô-* remains a productive prefix in Penang Hokkien; a brand of craft beer recently released in Penang was humorously named “Ang Moh Leng Te” 紅毛冷茶 ‘the red-hairs’ cold tea’.

Tâng-lâng 唐儂 ‘Tang person’ is the second most common of the ethnic prefixes, indicating Chinese ethnicity, and is generally used for those who do not hold Chinese nationality. The term predates modern Chinese concepts of nationalism, whilst still recognizing commonalities of culture and language with other Chinese groups such as Cantonese and Hakkas.¹⁵ The related terms *T’ang-yân*, *Tong-nyin*, and *Tâng-nâng* exist in spoken Cantonese, Hakka, and Teochew respectively, but *T’ong-yân* is generally no longer used amongst younger Cantonese speakers in Malaysia, for whom *Wā-yân*, modelled on Mandarin *Huaren* 華人, is the preferred term. A feature of Penang-style Hokkien is the use of the disyllabic *Tâng-lâng* 唐儂 in the creation of new compound words, where earlier usage preferred the monosyllable *Tâng* 唐. Barclay’s *Dictionary* (1873) and Francken and de Grijps’ *Dictionary* (1889) both list *Tâng-lâng* with the meaning ‘a Chinese’, but list only the compounds *Tâng-ōa* 唐話 for the Chinese language and *Tâng-jī* 唐字 for Chinese characters,¹⁶ and Barclay’s supplement of 1923 does not contain any new compounds with either *Tâng* or *Tâng-lâng*. In contrast, Penang Hokkien has many compounds prefixed with *Tâng-lâng* to mark connection with Chinese material and social culture (Table 5.4). In this way, Penang Hokkien speakers differentiate them from the similar features in the foreign cultures to which Chinese in the Straits Settlements were exposed.

15 The name *Tâng-lâng* first appears in a Southeast Asian context in Ma Huan’s 馬歡 1433 description of Java in his book *The Overall Survey of the Ocean’s Shores* (瀛涯勝覽 *Yingyai shenglan*) as a collective term for people from Guangdong, Zhangzhou, Quanzhou, and other places who have come live in Java, some of whom had converted to Islam.

16 Medhurst (1832: 661) has both the literary (*Tōng-jîn*) and colloquial (*Tâng-lâng*) reading.

TABLE 5.4 Compounds with *Tîg-lâng* 'Chinese'

English	Penang Hokkien	Meaning of Penang term in other varieties	Amoy/Taiwan equivalent
age according to Chinese reckoning (usually one's Western age plus one)	<i>Tîg-lâng-hòe</i> 唐儂歲	Tang person age	<i>hòe</i> 歲
birthday according to the lunar calendar	<i>Tîg-lâng-se.ⁿ-jít</i> 唐儂生日	Tang person birthday	<i>long-lék se.ⁿ-jít</i> 農曆生日
Chinese characters	<i>Tîg-lâng-jī</i> 唐儂字	Tang person characters	<i>Hàn-jī</i> 漢字
Chinese doctor, doctor of TCM	<i>Tîg-lâng-sin-se.ⁿ</i> 唐儂先生	Tang person master	<i>tiong-i</i> 中醫
Chinese language; Mandarin	<i>Tîg-lâng-ōa</i> 唐儂話	Tang person speech	<i>Tiong-bûn</i> 中文, <i>Tiong-kok-ōe</i> 中國話, <i>Hôa-gú</i> 華語, <i>Kok-gí</i> 國語, <i>Phó-thong-ōe</i> 普通話
Chinese lunar calendar	<i>Tîg-lâng-láh-jít-tô</i> 唐儂曆日圖	Tang person calendar	<i>kū-lék</i> 舊曆, <i>lông-lék</i> 農曆
Chinese-medium school	<i>Tîg-lâng-óh(-tîg)</i> 唐儂學(堂)	Tang person school	<i>Tiong-bûn hák-hāu</i> 中文學校
Chinese name	<i>Tîg-lâng-miâ</i> 唐儂名	Tang person name	<i>Tiong-bûn-miâ</i> 中文名
Chinese New Year	<i>Tîg-lâng-chia.ⁿ</i> 唐儂正	Tang person first month	<i>sin-chia.ⁿ</i> 新正, <i>kòe-nî</i> 過年, <i>chhun-chiat</i> 春節 (Amoy)
Chinese person, Overseas Chinese; Chinese (language), Chinese (school subject)	<i>Tîg-lâng</i> 唐儂	Tang person	<i>Hàn-chók</i> 漢族 (Amoy), <i>Hôa-jîn</i> 華人, <i>Tiong-bûn</i> 中文, <i>Tiong-kok-ōe</i> 中國話, <i>Hôa-gú</i> 華語, <i>Phó-thong-ōe</i> 普通話
Chinese tea	<i>Tîg-lâng-tê</i> 唐儂茶	Tang person tea	<i>tê</i> 茶

TABLE 5.4 Compounds with *Tńg-lâng* 'Chinese' (cont.)

English	Penang Hokkien	Meaning of Penang term in other varieties	Amoy/Taiwan equivalent
third month of the lunar calendar	<i>Tńg-lâng saⁿ-goéh</i> 唐儂三月	Tang person March	<i>long-lék sa-goéh</i> 農曆三月
to be conservative in one's attitudes; to have old-fashioned Chinese ideas	<i>Tńg-lâng-sim</i> 唐儂心	Tang person heart	<i>pó-siú</i> 保守
to study in a Chinese-medium school	<i>thák Tńg-lâng-chhe-h</i> 讀唐儂冊	read Tang person books	<i>thák tiong-bún hák-hāu</i> 讀中文學校 (Taiwan), <i>thák tiong-bún óh-tńg</i> 讀中文學堂
Traditional Chinese Medicine	<i>Tńg-lâng-ióh</i> 唐儂藥	Tang person medicine	<i>tiong-ióh</i> 中藥, <i>Hàn-ióh</i> 漢藥

In the past, *Tńg-Soaⁿ* 唐山 (lit. 'Tang Mountain') was the common vernacular word for 'China' in almost all ethnic Chinese communities outside China, who had migrated from the southern coast of China. The term has the connotations of the "old country" and in Penang, those who had been born in China and spent a portion of their life there were known as *Tńg-Soaⁿ-lâng* 唐山儂. An additional term, *Tńg-Soaⁿ a-pe-h* 唐山阿伯 (lit. 'Tang Mountain uncle') refers to the older generation of men who were born and grew up in China before coming to Malaya, and to act *Tńg-Soaⁿ-lái* 唐山來 (lit. 'coming from Tang Mountain') is used for perceived unfavourable characteristics or conservative behaviour associated with these people. It is only recently that *Tńg-Soaⁿ* 唐山 for 'China' has become archaic and only older people use it, whereas people under the age of sixty would use *Tiong-Kok* 中國.¹⁷ Nevertheless, the distinction between a *Tńg-lâng* and a *Tiong-Kok-lâng* 中國儂 is still maintained, in

17 This may be because of its associations with the expression *túiⁿ Tńg-Soaⁿ* 轉唐山 'to return to China' being used as a euphemism for death.

the way that *Huaren* 華人 ‘an ethnic Chinese’ and *Zhongguoren* 中國人 ‘a PRC national’ are marked off in Malaysian Mandarin.

The term *Hoan-á* 番仔 is used in all varieties of Hokkien, but has differing meanings depending on where Hokkien is spoken. Its most basic meaning lies somewhere between ‘savage’ and ‘foreigner’, but in different varieties the meaning has narrowed and became attached to specific groups of people, usually the indigenous peoples in the lands to which Hokkiens have migrated. In Taiwanese it refers to Formosan aboriginals,¹⁸ in the Philippines generally to Tagalogs, in Thailand to native Thais in contrast to Thai Chinese, and in Amoy – where there are no indigenous people other than the locals – it refers to Westerners, substituting the last syllable of the older term for Westerners *âng-mô-hoan* 紅毛番 for the whole word, where other varieties have dropped it. *Hoan-á* was formerly used in both Amoy and Taiwan with a wider meaning, marking things that had come from overseas, such as *hoan-á-hóe* 番仔火 ‘matches’. In Penang, the word has narrowed its meaning and refers specifically to Malays. It is used in a similar way to the above two terms: to mark out things associated with Malay culture. The offensive “savage” connotation of the word has generally been lost. In contrast to Amoy Hokkien, where the word is falling out of use, *Hoan-á*, like *Âng-mô*, has taken on a life of its own. Thus a *Hoan-á-kiá* 番仔囝 ‘Malay son’ is a young Malay man, a *Hoan-á-khu* 番仔區 is an area where Malays form the majority of the population, and *Hoan-á-chiáh* 番仔食 refers to Malay cuisine (*nasi Melayu*). The word *Hoan-á* also refers to the Malay language as spoken or as a subject taught at school. To *kóng Hoan-ná* 講番仔 is to speak Malay, and *Hoan-á-chhe-h* 伊番仔冊 (lit. ‘Malay books’) refers to Malay-medium schooling. As the Roman (*Rumi*) script has long replaced Arabic-based Jawi as the most common mode of writing Malay, the term *Hoan-á-jī* 番仔字 (lit. ‘Malay words’) refers to written Malay in roman letters, whereas the older Arabic-based Jawi script – still a fairly common sight in Malaysia – is termed *tāu-gê-jī* 豆芽字 ‘bean sprout letters’ because of its resemblance to bean sprouts. The religion of the Malays, Islam, although generally termed *Hôe-kàu* 回教, is also referred to with *Hoan-á* in a few compounds (Table 5.5).

18 This usage is now considered offensive, and the neutral *goân-chú-bîn* 原住民 is now the preferred term.

TABLE 5.5 Compounds with *Hoan-á* 'Malay'

English	Penang Hokkien	Meaning of Penang term in other varieties	Amoy/Taiwan equivalents
Eid, Hari Raya	<i>Hoan-á-chia</i> ^a 番仔正	[not understood]	<i>Khai-chai-cheh</i> 開齋節
Malay person; Malay language	<i>Hoan-á</i> 番仔	Westerner (Amoy), Indigenous Formosan (Taiwan)	<i>Má-lái-lâng</i> 馬來儂
Mosque	<i>Hoan-á-am</i> 番仔庵	[not understood]	<i>cheng-chin-sī</i> 清真寺
to convert to Islam	<i>jíp-Hoan</i> 入番 ^a	[not used, could be taken to mean to marry into an indigenous family in Taiwan]	<i>kui-hiòng hōe-kàu</i> 歸向回教 (Taiwan)
to speak Malay	<i>kóng hoan-ná</i> 講番仔	to speak English (Amoy), ^b to speak an indigenous Formosan language (Taiwan)	<i>kóng Má-lái-ōe</i> 講馬來話

a A calque from Malay *masuk Melayu* in the same meaning.

b Taiwanese and Amoy would demand that the *ōe* 話 'language' suffix is used. In Penang Hokkien, this is pronounced *ōa* and is optional.

The last of the four most common ethnic prefixes is not a native Hokkien word, but is noted here as it functions in the same way as the above three. This is *Kè-lêng-á* 吉寧仔, usually translated carelessly into English as 'Indian', which refers specifically to Tamil-speaking Hindu Malaysians of Indian descent, and derives from the Malay *Keling*. This word ultimately derives from Sanskrit *Kāliṅga*, the name of an old kingdom on the Coromandel Coast mentioned in the second chapter of the *Sejarah Melayu* 'Malay Annals'. Sensitivities around its use – due to the erroneous belief that the term originates from the onomatopoeic "clink-clink" of either Indian foot-bangles or the chains of indentured labourers – have resulted in some speakers using *Īn-tō* 印度 to replace it in recent years. However, this word makes no distinction between Indian nationals and Malaysian Indians, and also fails to take into account the linguistic and cultural differences amongst different groups of Indians,

as *Kè-lêng-á* in most contexts refers to Tamil speakers specifically. Therefore *Kè-lêng-á-ōa* 吉寧仔話 is the Tamil language, and it is written in *Kè-lêng-á-jī* 吉寧仔字 (lit. ‘Kling characters’), the Tamil script. Some exceptions to this are the terms *Kè-lêng-á-hì* 吉寧仔戲, which refers to any Indian films, be they from Bollywood or Kollywood, *Kè-lêng-á-hióh* 吉寧仔簪 ‘Indian leaves’ for curry leaves, and terms relating to the Hindu religion. Hindu gods and notable Hindu temples in Penang are known as *Kè-lêng-á ang-kong* 吉寧仔尙公, although *Kè-lêng-á-am* 吉寧仔庵 is also used in the latter meaning. To pray to these deities or *pài Kè-lêng-á ang-kong* 拜吉寧仔尙公 also has the extended meaning of being a Hindu. *Kè-lêng-á-chiaⁿ* 吉寧仔正 ‘Indian New Year’ is the festival of Deepavali, although – like *Hoan-ná-chiaⁿ* (Hari Raya) – this festival is unconnected to the advent of a new year; *chiaⁿ* 正 has undergone a shift in meaning to indicate the most important festival in the religious calendar rather than a new year (Li 2007: 61–63). Another term related to food, *Kè-lêng-á-pūiⁿ* 吉寧仔飯, refers to Indian-style curries served with steamed rice, but is also used in a similar way to English “porridge”: as a metaphor for prison food. To say someone is *chiáh-Kè-lêng-á-pūiⁿ* 食吉寧仔飯 ‘eating Indian curries’ is equivalent to saying they are “doing time”.

5 Local Concepts and New Things

A number of compound terms exist for things that were rare or unknown in late nineteenth-century Fujian, and therefore usually have no Amoy or Taiwanese equivalent. These relate to the history of Malaysia, the colonial government, local industries, and names of subvarieties of local fruits (Table 5.6).

TABLE 5.6 Words for local politics, officialdom, local industries, and material culture

English	Penang Hokkien	Meaning
area under government control during the Malayan emergency	<i>pé-h-khu</i> 白區	white district
communist-controlled area during the Malayan emergency	<i>o-khu</i> 烏區	black district
dredge for a tin mine	<i>thih-chûn</i> 鐵船	ironclad
formic acid (used to coagulate rubber)	<i>chhiū-leng-chhò·</i> 樹朥醋	rubber vinegar

TABLE 5.6 Words for local politics, officialdom, local industries, and material culture (*cont.*)

English	Penang Hokkien	Meaning
governor of Penang	<i>jī-ông</i> 二王	second king; viceroy
governor's residency	<i>jī-ông-chhù</i> 二王厝	second king's house
I.C. office (where one goes to pick up one's national identity card)	<i>teng-kì-koan</i> 登記關	registration office
<i>kebaya</i> (the embroidered blouse traditionally worn by the Nyonyas)	<i>poàⁿ-tng-té</i> 半長短	half-long-short (a description of the garment's uneven length)
Malaysian Federal Reserve Unit	<i>âng-thâu-peng</i> 紅頭兵	the red head soldiers (the name derives from their red berets)
mangle (used for turning out sheets of rubber)	<i>chhiū-lêng-ká</i> 樹朥絞	rubber mangle
opencast mine; tin mine	<i>khut-lông</i> 窟廊	pit corridor
<i>orang minyak</i> (a type of Malay ghost covered with oil)	<i>o-iû-lâng</i> 烏油儂, <i>o-iû-kúi</i> 烏油鬼	oil man (calque from Malay); oil ghost
<i>pisang emas</i>	<i>kim-chio</i> 金蕉	gold banana (calque from Malay)
<i>pisang keling</i> (a type of short, sweet banana)	<i>Kè-lêng-á-chio</i> 吉寧仔箸	Indian banana
police detective	<i>âm-pâi</i> 暗牌 (also known in Singapore)	hidden badge (on account of a detective wearing no uniform)
police sergeant	<i>saⁿ-liáp-cheⁿ</i> 三粒星, <i>saⁿ-oáh</i> 三劃	three stars; three stripes
rubber plantation	<i>chhiū-leng-pa</i> 樹朥芭	rubber forest (<i>pa</i> is a probable loan from Thai <i>paa</i> ป่า)
smaller, wild variety of durian	<i>soaⁿ-liû-liân</i> 山榴槿	mountain durian
soursop (<i>Annona muricata</i>)	<i>âng-mô-liû-liân</i> 紅毛榴槿	red-hair durian (presumably a calque from Malay <i>durian belanda</i> , also known in Singapore)
tin refinery	<i>siah-bí-lông</i> 錫米廊	tin ore corridor

TABLE 5.6 Words for local politics, officialdom, local industries, and material culture (cont.)

English	Penang Hokkien	Meaning
to tap rubber	<i>koah-chhiū-leng</i> 割樹朥, <i>phah-chhiū-leng</i> 撲樹朥	to cut rubber; to hit rubber
traffic police	<i>pé-h-kha-té</i> 白骹底 (also known in Singapore)	white leg-bottoms (a reference to the white spats that are part of some police uniforms)
type of durian with a particularly green rind	<i>chhe.ⁿ-phôe-kiáⁿ</i> 青皮囡	green-skinned son
type of durian with an orangey flesh	<i>âng-bah-kiáⁿ</i> 紅肉囡	red-fleshed son
type of moist banana	<i>tâ-lí-chio</i> 銅鑼蕉	copper coin banana

Penang Hokkien speakers required new words for inventions and institutions that became common throughout the industrialized and urbanized world of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They were open to borrowing to fill these lexical gaps, and many terms such as ‘taxi’, ‘radio’, ‘bus’, ‘cheque’, ‘gas tank’, ‘license’, ‘lorry’, ‘tyre’, and ‘commission’ entered the language, modified to some extent to fit to Hokkien phonology. Sino-Japanese words for some of these new things – such as *tiān-ōa* 電話 ‘telephone’ – did make their way into Penang Hokkien, as did some later coinages for things that became common in the last decades of the twentieth century, such as computers and air conditioning. These were adopted into Penang Hokkien during the 1970s or 1980s. At a time when the ability to read and write Mandarin Chinese was already on the rise in Malaysian Chinese communities, there was also increased consumption of entertainment from Taiwan and Hong Kong. As the Mandarin used outside China generally followed ROC national standard of *Guoyu* – in preference to *Putonghua* promulgated as the standard within the PRC – borrowings dating from this time reflect this trend. Penang Hokkien still uses ROC *lêng-khi* 冷氣 ‘air conditioning’ and *tiān-náu* 電腦 ‘computer’ in place of PRC coinages such as *khong-tiâu* 空調 and *kè-sng-ki* 計算機, which are the preferred terms in Amoy. Aside from these types of loanwords, Penang Hokkien speakers have derived a wide range of neologisms that are incomprehensible to speakers of other varieties, or misunderstood because they have different meanings (Table 5.7).

TABLE 5.7 Words for new inventions

English	Penang Hokkien	Meaning of Penang term in other varieties	Amoy/Taiwan equivalents
ambulance	<i>âng-síp-jī-chhia</i> 紅十字車, <i>âng-cháp-jī-chhia</i> 紅十字車, ^a <i>ló-kun-chhia</i> 老君車	red cross vehicle, doctor vehicle	<i>kiù-hō--chhia</i> 救護車
bank account	<i>hō-kháu</i> 戶口	household (Taiwan), household registration (Amoy)	<i>kháu-chō</i> 口座 (Taiwan), <i>siàu-hō</i> 數號 (Amoy)
crash helmet	<i>thih-bō</i> 鐵帽	iron hat	<i>an-choân-bō</i> 安全帽
electrical socket	<i>tiān-thâu</i> 電頭	electricity head	<i>chhah-chō</i> 插座
holiday house	<i>chiáh-hong-lâu</i> 食風樓 ^b	eat wind building	<i>piát-sū</i> 別墅
hospital	<i>ló-kun-chhù</i> 老君厝, <i>ló-kun-lâu</i> 老君樓, ^c <i>pē.ⁿ-chhù</i> 病厝	doctor house, doctor building, sick house	<i>pē.ⁿ-iⁿ</i> 病院, <i>i-ⁿ</i> 醫院
life ring	<i>pó-ke-kho</i> 保家箍	insurance ring	<i>kiù-seng-khoân</i> 救生圈
lifejacket	<i>pó-ke-saⁿ</i> 保家衫	insurance jacket	<i>kiù-seng-i</i> 救生衣
maternity hospital; maternity ward	<i>se.ⁿ-kiáⁿ-tîg</i> 生囡堂	hall for giving birth	<i>hū-sán-kho i-ⁿ</i> 婦 產科醫院

a Red crosses have not been used on ambulances since the Malaysian red cross became Malaysian Red Crescent in September 1975, but the word is still widely known and used.

b *chiáh-hong* 食風 'to eat the wind' is a calque from Malay *makan angin*, with the extended meaning of taking the air or taking a holiday.

c Both *pē.ⁿ-chhù* 病厝 and *ló-kun-chhù* 老君厝 appear in Lo Man Yuk as Penang usage, but *pē.ⁿ-chhù* 病厝, possibly a calque from older Malay *rumah sakit*, appears to have largely fallen out of use.

TABLE 5.7 Words for new inventions (cont.)

English	Penang Hokkien	Meaning of Penang term in other varieties	Amoy/Taiwan equivalents
mental hospital; lunatic asylum	<i>siáu-lâng-keng</i> 痲儂間	crazy person house	<i>sin-keng-pēⁿ-iⁿ</i> 神經病院
mobile phone	<i>chhiú-tiān</i> 手電, <i>chhiú-ê tiān-ōa</i> 手个電話	torch, hand telephone (calque from Malaysian English <i>handphone</i>)	<i>chhiú-ki</i> 手機
plastic bag	<i>goân-chú-lông</i> 原子囊, <i>goân-chú-tē</i> 原子袋	particle bag (<i>plastic-lông</i> is also commonly used)	<i>sok-ka-tē</i> 塑膠袋 (Taiwan), <i>sok-liāu-tē</i> 塑料袋 (Amoy)
refrigerator	<i>sng-tû</i> 霜櫥	ice box	<i>peng-siuⁿ</i> 冰箱
traffic roundabout	<i>iⁿ-kho--khoân</i> 圓箍圈	circle-ring-circle	<i>iⁿ-khoân</i> 圓圈 (Taiwan), <i>khoân-tó</i> 環島 (Amoy)
transformer; diesel generator; car battery; electricity meter	<i>tiān-siauⁿ</i> 電箱	electricity box	<i>piàn-ap-khì</i> 變壓器, <i>chhâ-iû hoat-tiān-ki</i> 柴油發電, <i>tiān-pió</i> 電表

Several terms are derived through semantic extension, whereby a pre-existing word is used in a novel way unknown elsewhere. Some of these new usages derive from perceived resemblances, and others to well-known advertising symbols associated (or formerly associated) with the extended term. These words often retain their original meanings in addition to the extended idiomatic usage (Table 5.8).

Aside from these everyday expressions, Penang Hokkien contains a large number of slang and argot terms derived through idiomatic extension related to sexual activity, death, or other taboo subjects, such criminal as triad-related activities. These words deserve their own separate study.

TABLE 5.8 Extended meanings

Penang Hokkien word	Original meaning	Extended meaning
<i>âng-hê</i> 紅蝦	red prawn	a cultivar of durian with an orangey flesh
<i>bong-kha-chhuiⁿ</i> 摸尻川	to touch a bum	a glove puppet (so named because the hand goes up the rear of the puppet)
<i>chhiāuⁿ-gê</i> 象牙	elephant tusk; ivory	a type of large, greenish banana
<i>chiàu-kiàⁿ</i> 照鏡	to reflect in the mirror	to undergo an X-ray
<i>hê--bôe</i> 蝦尾	prawn tail	an outboard motor, a propeller (named on account of its appearance; in Taiwan <i>thui-chìn-khi</i> 推進器)
<i>hóe-chìn</i> 火箭	rocket	the Democratic Action Party (DAP; from the rocket used as the party's symbol)
<i>lāu-hó--thâu</i> 老虎頭	tiger's head	banknote; paper currency (from a series of Malaysian banknotes that had a tiger's head as the watermark, removed from 1982 onwards)
<i>liām-keng</i> 念經	to chant a Buddhist sutra	to attend Friday prayers as a Muslim; to read the Quran; to be a practising or devout Muslim
<i>o-káu</i> 烏狗	black dog	stout, Guinness (so named because the brand of stout sold in Malaysia for many years had a bulldog's head on the bottle)
<i>pùn-chhìn</i> 磅秤	pair of scales	Barisan National (so called because the party uses a pair of scales as its symbol)
<i>soaⁿ-téng</i> 山頂	on the mountain	out of town; in the suburbs; suburban
<i>tu-lóng</i> 豬欄	pigpen	a child's playpen

6 Concluding Remarks

The terms highlighted in this chapter reflect a common tendency of Sinophone Southeast Asia towards creating their own terms rather than simply borrowing from Mandarin. These locally invented elements, often from purely Hokkien components, demonstrate the importance of “thinking beyond *rojak*”. They

also provide a case study in which Chineseness is problematized, as many Penang Hokkiens can express their identity in a variety of ways. Nevertheless, over the past twenty or so years, conditions amenable to the development of distinctive neologisms have greatly altered for Penang Chinese. Although there is considerable community interest in Penang Hokkien – resulting in the publications of dictionaries, collections of songs and poetry, a revival campaign, as well as the production of a weekly podcast and a feature film in the language – the ability to speak, understand, read, and write Mandarin has increased significantly since the 1980s to the point that many Penang Chinese under the age of thirty are no longer proficient in speaking Penang Hokkien. Through increased familiarity with written Chinese, Mandarin, and the speech habits of Taiwanese Hokkien speakers, many younger speakers have begun to modify their vocabulary in accordance with their knowledge of these other languages, because they perceive these speech forms to be “purer” and more “correct” than the *rojak* variety spoken by their parents and grandparents. These attitudes, coupled with ethnic tensions within Malaysia, have resulted in a sharp decrease in the use of Malay loanwords and a new layer of superstrate Mandarin vocabulary entering Penang Hokkien. They do so either as direct loans in which the Mandarin pronunciation remains intact (for instance *Huayu* 華語 for ‘Mandarin’), or as graphic loans or loans by analogy in which the Mandarin compound word generates its real or imagined cognate in Hokkien according to its characters (e.g. the same characters pronounced as *Hôa-gú*).

Hokkien programming on Hua Hee Dai presents a language that is still recognisable as Penang Hokkien due to its pronunciation, but reflects all of the above trends of following Mandarin usage as a standard and is fairly restricted in its use of Malay and English loanwords. The consequences of these trends for distinctive Penang vocabulary is twofold: some terms may be unknown to younger speakers and end up being replaced by new formations modelled on Mandarin, such as *Tiong-i* 中醫 ‘Chinese medicine’ for *Tng-lâng-ióh* 唐儂藥, *chò-ài* 做愛 ‘to make love’ in place of *kiâⁿ-pâng* 行房, and *Hàn-jī* 漢字 ‘Chinese characters’ in place of *Tng-lâng-jī* 唐儂字. Other fairly well-known terms are discarded because they are considered old-fashioned, rustic, or are seen to reflect ignorance, provincialism, or old attitudes, resulting in the replacement of *Tng-soaⁿ* 唐山 ‘Tang Mountain’ by *Tiong-kok* 中國 ‘China’ and *kè-lêng-á ang-kong* 吉寧仔尪公 ‘Hindu deities’ by *În-Tō-kàu* 印度教 ‘Hinduism’. Vocabulary that is unlikely to change in this way is that related directly to Malaysian life and material culture.

Certain historical factors have led to the formation of distinctive native vocabulary in Penang Hokkien, including low Chinese literacy, a multilingual

and multicultural environment, the lack of entertainment media, and the relative isolation of Penang Chinese from other large communities of Hokkien speakers. Because of the high proportion of Malay and English loanwords in Penang Hokkien, neologisms derived from the native Hokkien element have not received much in the way of serious analysis or study. Currently, Penang Hokkien is undergoing a shift in its vocabulary due to intense contact and competition with Mandarin in education, entertainment, and social spheres. If Penang Hokkien survives as a spoken language in the future, and Mandarin Chinese remains the primary language of education for Penang Chinese, it is likely that many of these distinctive terms will soon be discarded and lost, so there is no better time than the present to collect and analyse them for the insights they provide into the history, culture, and mindset of the speakers of this distinctive language.

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