

Building Heritage

Ep 12: Growing Up Ngai

with Michael and Chon



Chon Tu, his siblings
& grandpa

Chon Tu

Chon was born in England and raised in London in a fully Ngai speaking family and household. Chon's parents and family left North Vietnam as refugees in the 1970's. He is now navigating raising his own children as 3rd generation. Read more about Chon's upbringing and thoughts on his blog!

[CHECK OUT CHON'S BLOG HERE](#)



Michael Tu as a young
child

Michael Tu

Michael Tu grew up on Vancouver Island after many of his family members left Vietnam as refugees in the 1970's. He spent his entire childhood learning and speaking Ngai to his mother and extended family. Over the past years, Michael has become deeply curious about his roots, culture and exploration of Ngai as a part of his identity.

" The moment you heard [Ngai], you almost felt a sense of security, 'okay they're not strangers, I'm safe'... there was a sense of familiarity to it."

The Ngai Population**What we know so far ...**

In order to get to the granular group that is the Ngai people, there are 2 important groups that provide more clarity on the way to understanding. The Hoa people - who are those of Han Chinese ancestry who immigrated to Vietnam, and the Hakka People - a subgroup of the Han Chinese. Hakka people get their name from the Cantonese words 客 Hak3 - which means guest and 家 Gaa1 meaning family - so the translation is literally guest families.

Knowing those 2 overarching groups, is where we can begin to explore the Ngai population. From what I've researched, the Ngai population is sometimes referred to as the Hakka-speaking community in Vietnam and other nearby countries of Indochina, whose ancestors were of Han Chinese in Southern China.

According to the Vietnamese government, many, if not all Ngai people had never considered themselves Hakka. Most of the known Ngai population in Vietnam were situated in the Northern provinces, nearing the southern border of China. There is also some references out there claiming that because no one, including Chinese people really knows how to categorize the Ngai people, they were simply categorized as Hakka.

Since Hakka and Ngai share many similarities, and the ethnic ancestry of the two communities are in many ways alike, many younger generation Ngai people nowadays may categorize themselves closer to being Hakka, or a sort of variation of Hakka. Explore the links below to learn more about both languages!

Resources to Explore



- ▶ [Closest accent & pronunciation to Ngai - Channel: Henry Zhou](#)
- ▶ [Speaking Ngai \(Hakka\) - Channel: phississippi](#)
- ▶ [The Hakka, Explained - Channel: Asianometry](#)
- ▶ [The History of the Hakka People - Channel: Teacup Media](#)
- ▶ [What the Heck is Hakka? - Channel: HakkaChineseFood](#)
- ▶ [Four Variants of Hakka - Channel: inmimisbowl \(Michelle\)](#)
- ▶ [Hakka \(Ngai\) of Vietnam/越南的客家\(艾\)人/ - Channel: Brian Hong](#)
- ▶ [Hakka Language Discord Server \(some Ngai members\)](#)

PING PONG PEN INK BLOG

"Growing up, it's not just the resentment towards the culture, because as a kid that's your parents. The only experience of your culture is your parents - your parents embody that culture and they become the target for your resentment."



Do you speak Ngai too? Let us know!

