

SABAH'S HAKKA STORY

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The Basel Christian Church and 130 years of the History of Sabah: A Survey

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This paper was delivered on 13 November 2012 in Kota Kinabalu on the occasion of the Pioneers' Memorial Lectures by Chong Siaw Fung on behalf of the author, who had to travel abroad on official business, in conjunction with the 130 Anniversary of the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia.

Introduction

What is the significance of 130 years? For mortals like us it sounds a very long period, more than a life time. When set against an old country like China however, 130 years is but probably just half a dynasty or less. For a place like Sabah, 130 years represent the entire modern history of the state. Many historians accept that the modern history of Sabah began, in 1881, with the establishment of the British North Borneo Chartered Company (hereafter referred to as the North Borneo Company) rule. Yet barely a year later, the first group of Hakka Christians arrived in Sabah (known then as North Borneo). Since then, the Hakka Christians, who came down in 1882, had grown to be the largest Chinese community in Sabah.

This paper will look into the special place of the Basel Christian Church in negotiating the 130 years of the modern history of Sabah. It is a survey in nature and focuses on the following five aspects, namely:

- first, the Basel Christian Church as the impetus of Hakka migration to Sabah;
- second, the challenges of being pioneers;
- third, the Basel Christian Church as an independent (self-established) church;
- fourth, the Basel Christian Church Hakka leaders and the Chinese on the west coast of Sabah; and
- fifth, the Basel Christian Church as a impetus of change through education.