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Japanese Models, Chinese Culture
and the Dilemma
of Taiwanese Language Reform

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Introduction

One of the noteworthy phenomena in contemporary international contact and in cultural research has been the renewed interest in basic matters of language. Despite of the worldwide internationalization, and, in fact, due to this, communities still argue about their languages(s), (re)invent their languages and feel the need to redefine their linguistic principles. In view of this, one can no longer ignore the historical processes that have helped, shaped, and often accounted for the problematic interaction between language, culture and communication in contemporary society.

The history of language modernization in East Asia has been discussed in literature covering Japan, China, Korea and Vietnam, but to date the case of Taiwan still has remained largely unexplored. That is to say, historians and social scientists situate present-day Taiwanese language issues, such as debates on the integration of mother tongue instruction into the educational curriculum, political controversy about the use of transliteration systems for street names and the ascent of Taiwanese in media and politics within the framework of Taiwan's democratization since the late 1980s. However, no systematic study has been undertaken to elucidate its historical underpinnings, which trace to the Japanese colonial period (1895-1945). Said otherwise, the nature of Taiwan's present-day linguistic diversity may not have manifested itself the way it did had Taiwan not been colonized by Japan and, equally important, had China and Japan not embarked upon their process of nation-building and language standardization at that time. These two historical realities define the background against which we have to understand linguistic modernization in Taiwan, past and present.

The analytical framework of the book is centred round the concept of language standardization. In the ideology of nation-building, language standardization became the agency in achieving national cohesion and creating a common culture. Japan standardized its language in the wake of the Meiji reforms (1868) and China in its transition from empire to republic (1911). Within the span of these two dates, the island of Taiwan, dependency of Fujian Province since 1684 achieved its status as province in 1886, until it was annexed by Japan in 1895 following China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95). This shift in territorial belonging announced a new language player on the scene: the Japanese language coated in policies of Japanese linguistic colonialism. The purpose of the Japanese language in transforming society was three-fold. First, Japanese was economically productive. The Japanese colonial administrators required proficient Japanese speakers to integrate the colony into the homeland. Second, Japanese imparted modern ideas, based on Japanese norms, values and beliefs as the model social structure. Third, Japanese was repressive. The implicit logic of the Japanese literacy campaigns was to define a hierarchy of cultures, in which the Japanese language and script were culturally superior to the Chinese language and script.

Population consensuses did not focus on how well the Taiwanese spoke the Japanese language, but how well they could write. Substantial educational reform in the colony was to impart these new social and cultural values. The grand discourse of “civilizing mission” trapped the Taiwanese colonial subjects into the locus of Japanese modernity. “Becoming Japanese” entailed a process that destined them to be linguistically subdued and culturally incorporated overtime.

Yet, it was precisely the incompleteness of Japanese schooling which motivated Taiwanese to pursue higher education on the Japanese mainland as a means to ensure one’s chances for social mobility in colonial society. Having access to higher education in Japan inspired calls for colonial reform formulated in the context of “elevating Taiwan culture.” This gave rise to an educated Taiwanese middle-class that became actively engaged in determining their response to changing social and economic circumstances. Rather than passively surrendering to the political, economic and educational institutions imposed on them, they took hold of their newly acquired literacy. The consequences were a counter-movement to Japanese linguistic colonialism that I will refer to as linguistic nationalism.

From this perspective, language in colonial Taiwan came to assume a cultural marker of identity. This book, then, will explore the context in which the colonized elites came to reflect on the state of their spoken and written Chinese languages, and more specifically, the channels by which they adopted contemporaneous models of language modernization to generate alternative home repertoires. Said otherwise, this study examines the dilemma of Taiwanese colonial language reform against the background of the interaction between Japanese imposed models and Chinese local culture. An investigation into literary works of fiction written during the colonial period, either in Chinese or in Japanese, does not form part of this study, nor does a comparative examination of the Japanese policies toward the Austronesian languages. Focus of attention are three language reform movements that emerged throughout the 1920s and 1930s and the arguments each of them presented in selecting a linguistic norm as an appropriate means to counter the Japanese foreign language imposition and its cultural ideology. These three were the Romanized Taiwanese, Mandarin *baihuawen* and Written Taiwanese movements. How did they emerge in the colonial context? What forces instigated orthographic reform, as exemplified in the Romanized Taiwanese movement? How significant was the influence of the May Fourth movement and model of Chinese language standardization? What were the major arguments for and against the Written Taiwanese movement? To what extent was each movement tolerated or not by the Japanese colonial authorities, and what was the response of society at large? What is their relevance for present day Taiwanese issues on language and culture in identity formation? These questions and others are addressed in this book.

To date, scholarly discussions on the three language reform movements have remained clustered in literary approaches, in which special reference is made to the influence of the Chinese May Fourth movement. In so doing, not only has the Japanese

colonial context been downplayed, but also has the socio-linguistic reality, which throughout the colonial period localized Taiwanese as the widespread language of communication. For instance, studies have taken for granted that the Taiwanese vernacular newspaper would publish in a language that was not commonly spoken, or that one in Taiwan barely had the means to study China's new national language. Likewise, little attention has been paid to the Japanese accommodation to the local languages in education, and the fact that Taiwanese language reformers used the Japanese language as a vehicle of critique to the existing order.

The first chapter sketches some of the basic features of Taiwan's historio-linguistic development. This is situated against the background of Chinese migration to the island and the organization of a burgeoning literary culture during the Qing period. The second chapter situates the Taiwanese colony in the overall Japanese imperialist venture and examines the extent to which cultural policies had accommodated to the social reality of Taiwan. In particular, this chapter considers how the first two decades of the Taiwanese colonial experience created the conditions deemed necessary for Taiwanese reform-minded intellectuals to reflect on the Chinese language as a means for cultural advancement. The following three chapters are devoted to the three language reform movements.

Chapter 3 discusses the Romanized Taiwanese movement. This movement departed from the traditional ideographic script and promoted the usage of romanized Taiwanese as the most efficient medium to counter the problem of widespread illiteracy. Its proponent Cai Peihuo drew on romanization as the imported model by the Christian church. The Mandarin *baihuawen* movement, explained in Chapter 4, sets out with a discussion of the manner in which Chinese language debates were incorporated in the 1920s Taiwanese nationalist discourse and moves on to explore the attraction of the model of Chinese language standardization. Chapter 5 then centers around the Written Taiwanese movement that put the ideal of language standardization based on the spoken form into practice. The movement was not only confronted with the technical difficulties from the linguistic perspective but also faced ideological obstacles. As shall be demonstrated, creating a written form of Taiwanese challenged the traditional belief of a unified written script as a marker of Chinese cultural identity. The manner in which the colonial debate on language reform has impacted a historically informed consciousness in the postcolonial period is briefly discussed in the epilogue.

My analysis of language reform movements in Taiwan is based on a wide range of source material written by the educated fringe of colonial society. Basic materials are the writings in the vernacular journal *The Taiwan Minpao* and literary journals such as *Nanyin* amongst others. These popular articles are complemented with extensive use of diaries, (auto)biographies, textbooks, monographs and political treatises. References for the Japanese colonial framework include published and non-published Japanese colonial documents, as well as newspapers, journals and private correspondences.

Finally, it should be emphasized that the study of language reform movements in correlation with identity and modernization in non-Western societies is still in its incipient stage. This study is merely one step of the research in tracing the linguistic development of Taiwan, and thereby furthering the academic discipline of Taiwan Studies. Therefore, this book is not meant to serve as a tome of reference, but as a platform to launch further discussion.

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It is customary to comment on the use of characters and romanization. For pragmatic reasons, rather than political ideology, I have been forced to settle for the use of *Hanyu pinyin* 漢語拼音. It should be noted though that I have also followed the scholarly tradition of providing widely understood transliterations that come from other systems for the well-known exceptions. Names and terminology that have Japanese pronunciation are indicated with the letter J., accompanied by the Chinese translation indicated by Ch., H. for Hakka or T. for Taiwanese (Southern Min). In Japanese romanization, I have followed John H. Haig's *The New Nelson* (1997). Both Chinese and Japanese romanizations are supplemented by characters.

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