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## The Outlook for Taiwanese Language Preservation

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# The Outlook for Taiwanese Language Preservation

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## **Introduction**

In this paper I will discuss the history of the Taiwanese<sup>1</sup> language on the island of Taiwan, and explore its potential to continue into the future. I predict that over the next 50 years Taiwanese, as a language, will become increasingly marginalized, and that the recent increase in desire to promote Taiwanese is purely the short-term reaction of the generation of Taiwanese who went through periods of linguistic and cultural suppression. This is not to say that I believe it will completely disappear. To the contrary, I believe the Taiwanese language will remain as part of a cultural legacy, but how large that legacy will be depends on whether or not today's Taiwanese people are able to standardize a script and computer inputting system that will preserve it in a written form and open up its domain of usage.

## **A Brief History of the Origin of Taiwanese Language on Taiwan**

Long before the Chinese arrived on the island of Taiwan, it was inhabited by a race of aboriginal people with Malayo-Polynesian<sup>2</sup> roots. There is evidence that they arrived as early as 5,000 years ago. Up until the 17th century, the Aborigines made up the

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper Taiwanese (台語) refers to the Southern Min topolect used by the people of Taiwan, also called Hoklo or Holo.

<sup>2</sup> I have found sources giving other names such as Proto-Malays, Austronesian, and Austro-Polynesian. Their origin is estimated to have been somewhere in the Southeast Asian or Polynesian Island chains.

majority of the population,<sup>3</sup> but after a few waves of mass immigration from China, during the second half of the 17th century, Chinese composed the greater part of the population.<sup>4</sup>

These early Chinese settlers and pioneers brought with them their cultures and languages. Most of the Chinese emigrated from Fujian and Guangdong provinces, with the largest proportion coming from the Zhangzhou and Quanzhou districts of Fujian.<sup>5</sup> The majority of the immigrants spoke variant forms of the Southern Min topolect, and a smaller segment spoke Hakka (客家話 - Kejiahua). At first, these people viewed themselves as Chinese, and based their identities strictly on what part of China they came from. However, as generations went by and they lost their connections to their homeland, they became a more homogenous society, but still considered themselves ethnically Chinese.

In 1684, Taiwan, for the first time, officially came under the jurisdiction of mainland China. Although Taiwan was neglected by the Qing rulers, some Chinese infrastructure was established on the island. A large portion of the infrastructure functioned as part of a bureaucratic, feudal system that took land away from the Taiwanese people and put it in the hands of the government. Along with this infrastructure, a Chinese education system was established, and with it a need for the written script of classical Chinese. Mandarin had not yet been designated as the standard form of speaking and pronunciation on the mainland, so the literary pronunciations of Taiwanese and Hakka were utilized. One implication of the Taiwanese depending on Classical Chinese for their script was that the potential for a vernacular written form of Taiwanese to develop was greatly reduced.

Thus began the sinicization of the people living in Taiwan. Over the next 200 years the culture and languages of Taiwan were to develop in isolation from mainland China, and evolve independently, under different conditions, from their counterparts across the Taiwan Strait. However, even though there was little contact with the mainland,

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<sup>3</sup> John Kwock-ping Tse, "Language and a Rising New Identity in Taiwan," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, no. 143 (2000), pp. 151-164.

<sup>4</sup> Based on information from: Bing Su, *Taiwan's 400 Year History: The Origins and Continuing Development of the Taiwanese Society and People* (Washington: The Taiwanese Cultural Grass Roots Association, Inc., 1986).

<sup>5</sup> Tse (2000).

the immigrants and their descendents tried to maintain their Chinese ethnicity and identity.

### **The Japanese Occupation and Burgeoning Taiwanese Identity**

In 1895, the Chinese and Japanese governments came to an agreement under the Treaty of Shimonoseki that ceded the territory of Taiwan to the Japanese. The colonization of Taiwan by the Japanese brought with it language policies restricting usage of local languages that became increasingly strict over time. This was the beginning of the long history of suppression of the local languages<sup>6</sup> and cultures belonging to the Taiwanese people.

The Japanese goal of occupying Taiwan was twofold: to create an economically strong and productive colony, and to completely assimilate the native people into the Japanese culture and way of life. This meant the eventual eradication of all local languages, to be replaced with Japanese. At first, Japanese was made the official language used in schools, but private local language schools were still allowed to operate. During the later period of Japanese occupation (1919-1945) local languages became banned from all public arenas, and the private local language schools were forced to close.<sup>7</sup> People were restricted to speaking their native tongue solely in private.

Although Taiwanese was suppressed, it did survive this period in a few different forms. Several decades prior to the Japanese occupation, a group of Presbyterian missionaries arrived on the island. In order to communicate with the local people and help convert them, the missionaries developed a Romanized script for Taiwanese, just as the Spanish and Dutch had done with some of the Aboriginal languages centuries before. This script created by the missionaries is aptly called Church Romanization, and it is one of the more widely accepted Taiwanese Romanization systems used today.

Towards the end of the Japanese Occupation, the seeds of a Taiwanese consciousness began to sprout. Faced with the invasion of a foreign culture, and feeling abandoned by the mainland Chinese, the people they had formerly considered as kin, the Taiwanese started to realize who they were not. In heart and soul they were not Japanese,

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<sup>6</sup> Local languages refers to Taiwanese, Hakka and the various languages of the native Aboriginal tribes.

<sup>7</sup> Tse (2000).

nor were they completely Chinese. The conception of a Taiwanese identity was in its infancy; but, on a subconscious level, many Taiwanese were aware of the influence their local languages had on their collective consciousness, and they were reluctant to let the languages die out. This movement towards an expression of a distinctive Taiwanese identity and culture is one of the main factors helping to preserve the local languages of Taiwan. Had the Taiwanese people passively allowed themselves to be assimilated into Japanese, it is unlikely that their culture or languages would have survived to today. On the contrary, even though they were restricted to the private domain, many people continued to educate their children in their local languages. In this fashion, Taiwanese and the other local languages were able to survive decades of suppression, but it was the next period of history that truly threatened them with extinction.

### **The Kuomintang (KMT) Regime and the Mandarin Language Policy**

At the end of World War II, Japan was forced to return the island of Taiwan to the Chinese government, which at the time was controlled by the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang or KMT). The Taiwanese were suddenly Chinese citizens again and forced to take sides in a complicated civil war. Taiwan became associated with the Nationalist Party, over the Communist Party, largely due to its location along the southern coast of China, which mostly supported the Nationalists. Over the next few years, more and more members of the Nationalist government retreated to Taiwan, and in 1949 the entire Republic of China (ROC) relocated to the island.

Unlike the Japanese, who infiltrated the existing Taiwanese infrastructure in a gradual fashion, Chiang Kai-shek and his Nationalists succeeded in using force to turn Taiwan overnight from a self-governing province into a dictatorship in all but name. In order to legitimize the Nationalist party's claim that it regarded Taiwan as the Republic of China, the government had to be representative of all parts of China geographically.

The need to present the ruling party in Taiwan as the sole legitimate government of China was so compelling that the island, not only in ideological thinking but also in institutional structure, was reduced to provincial status. As a result the overwhelming majority of the population was marginalized from the political process, with power and

influence in the hands of the mainlanders. The Taiwanese cultural elite also lost their social status and cultural expressions: history, language and voice.<sup>8</sup>

As this statement by Weiming Tu describes, the mainlanders had no qualms about restructuring Taiwan's local government into a national one, and in the process taking away every ounce of power allotted to Taiwan's own cultural elite and representatives. This change had extensive cultural and linguistic repercussions.

One of Chiang Kai-shek's most influential changes was the installation of the "Mandarin Language Policy" (國語運動), which made Mandarin the official language of Taiwan. This was one of the many ways the Nationalist government attempted to justify their claim that Taiwan was the new headquarters for the Republic of China. Mandarin had been the national language of the ROC, and should continue to be, even though Taiwanese, followed by Japanese, was the language most widely used on the island of Taiwan. Initially, local languages were tolerated as the language of instruction in the teaching of Mandarin, but because the changeover to Mandarin was viewed as taking too long, Mandarin was quickly established as the sole language to be used for education, and local language usage became illegal in the public sector.

Only the Presbyterian Church was permitted to use Taiwanese openly at this time. The Nationalists did not believe that allowing foreigners to continue speaking and practicing the local languages would have a negative effect on the absorption of Mandarin by the locals. Because the church was dependent on the Church Romanization script for all its printed materials, there was no easy way for them to switch over to Mandarin. Church Romanization had been designed specifically for Taiwanese, and the spelling of the syllables and tonal diacriticals were particular to the Taiwanese topolect. Had the Presbyterian Church created a script based on Chinese characters, I doubt the Nationalists would have been so lenient in permitting them to use and print church materials in a script for a local language.

Just as the Taiwanese had started to explore the concept of a Taiwanese identity, they were brutally submerged into a new society that required them to view themselves

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<sup>8</sup> Weiming Tu, "Cultural Identity and the Politics of Recognition in Contemporary Taiwan," in *Studies on Contemporary China: Contemporary Taiwan*, ed. David Shambaugh, pp. 71-96.

strictly as Chinese. Although forced to express a Chinese identity in public, many Taiwanese risked their lives to continue to speak and study their local languages in private. Some Taiwanese, like Liim Keehioong, secretly met in small groups to discuss and teach their local languages and cultures. In conjunction with his friends, Mr. Liim created a new written orthography for Taiwanese, known as Modern Literal Taiwanese (MLT), but did not release it to the public until 1987, after martial law was lifted.<sup>9</sup> In this way, many Taiwanese continued to hold onto their cultures and languages.

While the KMT's policies were strictly enforced in the capital of Taipei, their military presence was not large enough to constantly control the entire island. The Mandarin-only language policy succeeded in Taipei, the headquarters and capital of the Nationalist Government; however, elsewhere on the island, particularly in the south, the local people got away with speaking their local languages in some parts of the public domain. During Chiang Kai-shek's period of martial law, Taiwan began functioning under an imposed system of diglossia. The sudden appearance of the "high" language of Mandarin created an interesting phenomenon. Many characteristics of Mandarin became "bastardized" as the Taiwanese tried to conform to speaking Mandarin as their first language. The Mandarin spoken in Taiwan has been shaped and altered by Taiwanese to such a degree that many terms, grammatical phrases and pronunciations differ sharply from their mainland counterparts. Although Mandarin is still the most widely spoken language used on Taiwan, Taiwanese Mandarin differs so drastically from its mainland counterpart that many people suggest it should be acknowledged as its own language.

### **Present Situation**

For over 15 years, Taiwan has functioned under a multi-party system of democracy. With this self-run government and freedom of speech, the people of Taiwan have begun to express a new Taiwanese identity that utilizes Taiwanese as its voice. Even though the government is no longer controlled by the Nationalists, Mandarin is still the national language, and the official language of the academic world. People are free to express themselves in any language they choose; however, Mandarin remains the

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<sup>9</sup> Alvin Lin, "Writing Taiwanese: The Development of Modern Written Taiwanese," *Sino-Platonic Papers* No. 89 (January, 1999).



predominant language of the media. This section of my paper will focus on what parts of Taiwanese society today still utilize and depend on the Taiwanese language. I will explore why Taiwanese has become intrinsically tied into only a few, select facets of society, and whether it has the potential to increase its domain.

The realm where Taiwanese is most highly utilized in the official public sector is undoubtedly in political campaigning. Currently, approximately 75-80% of Taiwan's population speaks Taiwanese, and politicians hope to use this to their advantage by advertising their ability to speak it and thus persuade the people to feel a closer connection with them. Many candidates give speeches in Taiwanese while on their campaign trails in order to prove that they are a person of the people. The candidates who are incapable of speaking a local language tend to receive less support, attesting to the fact that the Taiwanese see a true representative of their territory as someone who can speak in a local, native language. During the regime of the KMT, all political affairs were conducted in Mandarin, and locals were not allowed in the government. Today, the Taiwanese are expressing their freedom from this oppressive time by selecting representation that embodies all aspects of a native Taiwanese, not just the Chinese part.

Leaving behind the mentality held by the Taiwanese a few hundred years ago, and then again forced on them by the KMT regime, Taiwanese no longer view themselves as a Chinese "sub-culture." The appeal of local language usage in political campaigning is reflective of the new way Taiwanese view their own culture. Now, "'Chinese culture' is merely part of the more encompassing, inclusive Taiwanese culture. Under the new mosaic model of multiculturalism, aboriginal cultures, along with the once disgraced imprints of Japanese colonialism...are now preserved and promoted to a 'national' status to represent Taiwanese culture."<sup>10</sup> With their newfound freedom, the Taiwanese are looking to include all of the different ethnic groups in their new identity. Rather than forcing a specific consciousness on everyone, they have created an all-inclusive identity that accepts, and even celebrates, the cultural differences found among the people of Taiwan.

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<sup>10</sup> Horng-luen Wang, "National Culture and Its Discontents: The Politics of Heritage and Language in Taiwan, 1949-2003," *Journal of the Society for Comparative Study of Society and History* (2004), pp. 786-815.

It is obvious that, on a local level in the political arena, having the capability to speak Taiwanese, or another local language, is one of the main factors in determining whether someone belongs within the circle of society. The language you use to express yourself is considered the most obvious identifier of your ethnic make-up, and there is no place where this is clearer than on the political playing field. So, local languages do play a major role in determining identity on the local level in Taiwan, but what about on the national level politically?

To native Taiwanese and outsiders alike, the language of Taiwanese has become closely associated with the Independence Movement, and could even be considered its voice. The Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) has been a strong advocate for Taiwan's independence (although the intensity of their actions has been decreasing), and has been one of the main promoters of the "Taiwanese Language Movement." Their main argument is that Taiwan is culturally, economically and politically separate from the mainland, and Chinese culture is only one of the many facets that comprise the greater Taiwanese identity. Through the creation of the "Language Equality Law," which promotes Taiwan's local languages as being on par with Mandarin, the DPP hopes to elevate the status of local languages and take away the stigma attached to them. The actions of the DPP have paved the way for Taiwanese language to receive recognition on the national level, but Mandarin is still in the spotlight as the official national language. Unless there is a serious effort to change Taiwan from the Republic of China to the Republic of Taiwan, there really is no likelihood that Taiwanese will receive national status.

The part of society in which language plays the most important role in shaping a person's identity is that of the academic realm. As children learn the tools they need to explore our world, the language of instruction used to present the material subconsciously influences how children determine their identity. Frequently, children will communicate with each other in the common tongue of their educational instruction. Since Mandarin is the sole language for instruction, the majority of school-aged children become accustomed to speaking Mandarin and feel more comfortable using it in daily life. The benefit here is that Mandarin has become the common language of the people and gives them a mutually intelligible language for communication. However, is Mandarin the

proper language to perform this role in Taiwanese society? Unfortunately, without a standardized script for Taiwanese, that language is incapable of functioning as the language of instruction for education. Today, many people have given up on the movement to change the language of instruction from Mandarin to Taiwanese due to a lack of feasibility. They also feel that Mandarin is a strong linguistic tool for the children since it has a wider range of usage on the international stage.

Besides being the medium of instruction, a language can also function as the material being taught. Currently, there is a desire to increase local language classes in public schools and make them more intensive. A few years ago, education policy allowed for local language (including Taiwanese, Hakka and various Aboriginal languages), culture and history to be taught for one hour a week in primary school. An hour a week in language training is not enough to effectively learn a language, so this class, at best, functions as a catalyst in making the younger generation aware of their cultural heritage. Many people saw this as a token representation of what they had been fighting for: a switch from Chinese-based teaching to more localized materials.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, without government assistance in helping to standardize a written and spoken form of Taiwanese suitable for academic instruction, the move towards creating classes in local language instruction is at a standstill.

Even though many of Taiwan's institutions are opening up to allow for local language usage and sensitivity towards local languages, there are many organizational obstacles that need to be overcome in the government before local languages, and Taiwanese in particular, can become a more intrinsic part of life in Taiwan. Currently, local languages are widely used as a spoken form of communication, but there has not been any significant movement towards standardizing them and making an official written orthography for Taiwanese. Without the capability to create written records in Taiwanese, the scope of potential usage is vastly reduced, and the preservation of the language itself is uncertain. Church Romanization is a written orthography that already has been widely used to record events and information, but these are mostly restricted to things associated with the Presbyterian Church's affairs. If the government does not

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<sup>11</sup> Shuanfan Huang, "Language, Identity and Conflict: A Taiwanese Study," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, no. 143 (2000), pp. 139-149.

succeed in standardizing a written orthography for Taiwanese while there is still a demand for it, then it will miss its window of opportunity. At worst, this could be the catalyst resulting in the extinction of many or all of the local languages of Taiwan. At best, it restricts local languages to their colloquial forms with only a cultural value.

Although little progress has been made towards standardizing local languages, there has been a strong push towards making English an official language of Taiwan. This means that two languages with extremely short histories on Taiwan, Mandarin and English, would be its national representatives. This may sound like a ridiculous political move, but the outcome of this policy, if enacted, and its effects on the local languages of Taiwan, could have deeper implications than expected. The majority of Taiwanese can speak only a handful of English phrases, but they consider English a language necessary to maintain international economic ties. Culturally, English is viewed as a neutral language, without connections to anyone's ethnic roots. The designation of English as an official language would create two opportunities for Taiwan. The first, on the international level, is a further distancing from China, where Mandarin is the sole official language. By changing the language that represents it internationally, Taiwan would be one step closer to justifying its right to becoming a sovereign state with its own voice in international organizations. The second opportunity is the marginalization of Mandarin usage in Taiwan.<sup>12</sup> Once the prestige associated with Mandarin was reduced, the possibility for Taiwanese language to regain a better footing would be increased. The English Language Policy is a neutral way of testing peoples' receptiveness to the introduction of multi-linguistic representation. It is a method of paving the way for Taiwanese to join the ranks of official languages, and of lessening Mandarin's hold on Taiwanese society.

Over the past 20 years, many steps have been taken towards eliminating the negative stigma associated with local languages and revitalizing their existence. Although Mandarin has become an integral part of Taiwanese society, and it appears that it will remain the national language and the official language of the government and education system, there is still a chance for Taiwanese to rise up and join its ranks as a national representative of Taiwan. The most significant factor allowing Mandarin to remain the

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<sup>12</sup> Wang (2004).

official language is its widely accepted scripts.<sup>13</sup> If the government standardized a written orthography for Taiwanese, to be used island-wide, Taiwanese would become a much more competitive language and could retake some of the local ground currently occupied by Mandarin.

### **Outlook for the Future of Taiwanese**

The potential for Taiwanese and other local languages to persevere into the future depends entirely on the younger generations in Taiwan. Ultimately, they are the ones who will have to decide how important it is to preserve Taiwan's native languages. Unlike their parents' and older generations, the Taiwanese youth are disconnected from Taiwan's oppressive past, and they rely on different elements to create their identity. While the young are extremely open-minded culturally, they are not as driven as the older generations to promote a distinctive Taiwanese identity.

A collective identity for a group of people is often determined based on ethnic, linguistic or national terms. However, there are many other factors that influence the range of who belongs within the context of the identity. One of the most important factors in Taiwan is having common historical roots. Taiwanese all share the same modern history, but there are generational gaps in how the historical events are perceived. These perceptions are based largely on whether or not an individual experienced a historical event first-hand. Those who did, specifically the older generations (40 years of age and older), have much stronger convictions in their desire to promote a Taiwanese identity. The younger generations (people under 40 years of age) grew up under more open conditions, giving them a relaxed attitude towards expressing a Taiwanese culture.

It is this very attitude that is influencing the younger generation's opinion on promoting the Taiwanese language. While they feel a cultural connection to the language, they seldom feel a necessity to seek to preserve and promulgate its usage. To them, Mandarin is the common language of today, and English is the language that will bring them into a prosperous future. Taiwanese and the other local languages are only important for communicating with the older generations, and the vast majority of youth

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<sup>13</sup> In Taiwan, Mandarin has three official scripts: Hanzi (漢字, Chinese characters), Bopomofo and Tongyong Pinyin (通用拼音).

are not that proficient in these languages. This lack of enthusiasm towards local language usage is the key issue that could lead to their demise.

According to a survey performed by Li-li Huang, James H. Liu and Maanling Chang, which analyzed Taiwanese attitudes towards their identity and historical events, there were pronounced differences when the responses were broken down along generational lines. They suggest that people's attitude towards their national history directly influences their evaluation of their own identity:

Examination of the correlations for older adults in the general population compared to students revealed that Chinese and Taiwanese identity was less compatible among older adults than among younger adults. This suggests that history is involved in the negative correlation, as older adults would have had more direct experience of the events nominated [by the people surveyed] than younger ones.<sup>14</sup>

Because the younger population of Taiwan did not live through the periods of suppression, they are more open to accepting the Chinese part of their identity. This factor is directly related to language attitudes, since the youth are not only satisfied with being Taiwanese Chinese, but are also satisfied with having a shared national language with the Communist mainland. It is the older generations who have the desire to promote a de-sinicized Taiwanese identity, and with it the local languages and cultures of Taiwan.

The most direct way to evaluate the young people's attitude towards local languages is to look at their favored language for communication. Without a doubt, the vast majority tends to have a preference for Mandarin, although they do maintain a capacity, in varying degrees, to code-switch to Taiwanese if the need arises. Unfortunately, local language usage among the younger people is very similar to that of second or third generation immigrants. They use the dominant language (here this is Mandarin) in their outside environment and their parents' mother tongue (Taiwanese or another local languages) when at home. There are some slight variations on this pattern, but as the young start to create their own households and have children, what will the

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<sup>14</sup> Li-li Huang, James H. Liu and Maanling Chang, "'The Double Identity' of Taiwanese Chinese: A Dilemma of Politics and Culture Rooted in History," *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 7 (2004), pp. 149-168.

language of their home be? Based on this model, we would assume it would become Mandarin, the language they are most comfortable speaking.

Looking at the Taiwanese youth of today, is there any domain in which they prefer to use a local language as their voice? One of the most obvious places to look would be their own cultural products, such as those in the entertainment industry. The feel of pop music in Taiwan today is very different from that of the late 1980s–early 1990s, which focused more on local languages and singers with a local heritage.<sup>15</sup> Today's pop music is dominated by Mandarin, and a large proportion of the singers are not even Taiwanese; instead, they are overseas Chinese. This change in trend can help us further understand how the youth want to be perceived.

The music industry has a great influence over popular culture, especially that of the younger generations of Taiwanese society (approximately 10–30 years of age). Some of the trends in the music industry are reflective of attitudes in their fans. Today's pop music is almost exclusively performed in Mandarin,<sup>16</sup> although there is some code-mixing involved, and some singers opt to sing the occasional song in their mother tongue. The mainstream of the music industry works in accord with general attitudes of young Taiwanese. Mandarin is the language of their voice, although there are still some concepts that are better defined using Taiwanese or English, and that is where the code-mixing fits in. English is generally used for the purpose of adding prestige and an element of trendiness to a song, while Taiwanese is used to express an idea that Mandarin is incapable of expressing.

The youth desire a capacity for English to prove they are modern and members of the global society. This desire is strongly rooted in the historical events they have lived through. Throughout most of their lives, Taiwan has lacked a presence on the international stage, and their desire to attain knowledge of English could represent their wish to gain some international recognition. They are no longer concerned with finding a voice for their native cultures, which has been done by the previous generations. The freedom to express themselves in their local languages is taken for granted by the vast

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<sup>15</sup> Such singers as Jiang Hui (江蕙) and Lin Qiang (林強) were celebrated for performing in Taiwanese.

<sup>16</sup> Look at such singers as Jolin Tsai (蔡依林), David Tao (陶[吉吉]), Elva Hsiao (蕭亞軒) or S.H.E. They are some of the top stars in Taiwan, and they sing exclusively in Mandarin with occasional English code-mixing.

majority of young Taiwanese, and they seem disassociated from the element of cultural heritage these languages provide.

However, there are still two sections of the music industry that do utilize local languages, and they are significant factors in helping to increase the prestige associated with local language. These are the rap and underground music industries. Perhaps because Taiwanese is the language most closely tied to the cultural roots of the Taiwanese people, it has become the main voice of the rap industry.<sup>17</sup> Mandarin is unable to provide the gritty, urban slang associated with rap, while Taiwanese fits the bill perfectly. Like Ebonics, the voice of American rap, Taiwanese is currently a purely spoken linguistic form, lacking a standardized written form. It also closely parallels Ebonics in that it is the "lower" language functioning in a system of diglossia (where standard American English is the "higher" form). Although acting as the voice of rap music is fairly limiting in range, this facet of Taiwanese has helped to secure its position and remind the young generations that it is a major piece of their cultural legacy.

The other section of the music industry that relies on local languages for its voice is the underground section. While the mainstream pop industry caters to teenagers relating such culturally "empty" topics as love and relationships, underground music tends to deal with more culturally relevant issues. Underground bands tend to draw on their own experiences to create their song lyrics, and this, in conjunction with the lack of restrictions that dominate the mainstream music industry, allows them to create true cultural reflections of the Taiwanese consciousness. Many underground bands still opt to sing in Mandarin, but in order to express the correct "mood" or "feeling" others choose Taiwanese or one of the other local languages.<sup>18</sup> Code-mixing is also more heavily used, and the language of underground music is more reflective of colloquial speech than that of its mainstream counterpart. Underground and rap music may not have as many

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<sup>17</sup> Some of the most popular rap singers/groups (MC HotDog (熱狗幫), Machi (麻吉&黃立成), and Stanley Huang (黃立行)) use Taiwanese, Mandarin and occasional English code-mixing in their music. Some of these singers/groups are more dependent on Mandarin than Taiwanese, but an element of Taiwanese language is needed for them to be considered true rap artists.

<sup>18</sup> Refer to such bands as Mayday (五月天)\*, Sticky Rice (糯米糰), Captain Peanut (花生隊長), and the Clippers (夾子樂團).

\*Mayday originally sang all of their songs in Taiwanese, but as they entered the mainstream realm they slowly evolved to sing almost exclusively in Mandarin.



followers as mainstream pop music, but in many ways they are more culturally accurate portrayals of the young generation, and they still rely heavily on the local languages of Taiwan.

The last topic relevant to determining the future for local languages is the technical world. Today, all fields and industries are dependent on technical support to function. Without an accurate and feasible inputting system, a language is not going to be usable for communicating data via computers, and I strongly question the ability of such a language to survive into the next century. The younger generations of society have grown up in a world ruled by computers and microchips, where playing video games and surfing the Internet dominates free time. If a language is not capable of having a presence on the Internet or lacks an inputting system, it will be devalued in the eyes of this technically savvy generation.

This is not to say that there are no websites that utilize Taiwanese as their script and voice. To the contrary, there are a growing number of Taiwanese websites, but the crucial question is, what information are they used to convey? Unfortunately, most Taiwanese websites are limited to teaching Taiwanese language or the culture of Taiwan. Relatively few Taiwanese websites hold information that would interest the younger generations, who already lack an interest in studying their native languages and cultures. A further hindrance is that these websites all use different written orthographies, and often visitors to a website must first become oriented to the script before they can discover what information there is to learn. People tend to prefer to explore Internet sites that are not so complicated.

This situation is a vicious cycle that goes back to the Taiwanese national government. If the government would work faster towards standardizing written and spoken Taiwanese, there is a greater chance that people would begin to depend on Taiwanese as a language in more domains. However, because people are still reluctant to use Taiwanese, especially without a standardized form, the government doesn't realize how dire the situation really is.

The younger generations still acknowledge the cultural value of their local languages, as can be seen by their presence in various art forms, such as music lyrics. In order for them to become an intrinsic part of the daily life of young people, local

languages must be given a larger domain of potential uses. It is the responsibility of the generations that currently hold political power to urge the government to work towards incorporating local languages into more functional roles in society. If no one actively seeks to increase the usage of local languages, then they will continue to become more and more marginalized as generations go by.

## **Conclusion**

Local language preservation in Taiwan has become, to a large extent, inseparable from the independence movement and new Taiwanese identity. Is this move towards creating a distinctive Taiwanese identity just a temporary trend ignited by the long suppressed feelings of a generation intent on taking control of its own destiny? Or is the new Taiwanese identity a consciousness that will transcend generations and persevere into the future? If either of these phenomena loses steam and dissipates, there is a good chance that Taiwanese and the other local languages of Taiwan will become extinct. But even if this should happen, Taiwanese language has already left its mark in two areas of Taiwanese society: it has helped to shape and mold Mandarin into a language more suitable to the Taiwanese people and their culture, and it is has been used to create many cultural products.

Over the next few decades, the job of local language preservation and promotion will fall into the hands of today's younger generations. It is clear that most Taiwanese are well aware of the cultural value of their local languages, but in order for these to continue to be living, functional languages, they must be given the chance to compete with Mandarin and English. If the local languages are not provided with the tools, namely standardized written orthographies, to function in the technical realm, there is a good chance that the local languages will become as obsolete as typewriters. Today's young Taiwanese are extremely tech savvy, and the fact that they have forsaken their local languages is a sign that these languages need to be updated to compete and exist in the ever-expanding world of technology.

Taiwanese is the local language with the greatest chance for continued survival. It is still spoken by an overwhelming majority of Taiwan's population. Due to restrictions in its range of uses, it is beginning to be neglected by the younger generations of

Taiwanese society. Taiwanese has already started its decline towards inevitable extinction, and unless the young generations are given the means to make Taiwanese a nationally functional language, the outlook for Taiwanese is very poor.

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