Introduction

In 1895, Taiwan shifted from a Chinese province to a Japanese colony. This fundamental change in “belonging” gradually drew the attention to Taiwan as an entity, along with the awakening of the Taiwanese people who directed their opposition to the structural and cultural inequalities established by the Japanese colonial authorities. One of these colonial policies was linguistic centralisation, mediated through formal education and literacy campaigns. Intellectual debates in the formation of the Taiwanese nationalist discourse in the 1920s and 1930s inspired calls for colonial reform formulated in the context of ‘elevating Taiwan culture’ (tisheng Taiwan wenhua). Demands for educational changes not only pertained to structural and institutional reform but also instigated a reflection on the inadequacy of the Chinese and Japanese languages in Taiwan in participating in the modern world that Japan promised. Three language reform movements emerged: the Mandarin baihuawen movement, the Romanised peh-oe-ji movement and the Written Taiwanese movement. Each movement was driven by the search for a common language that was capable to mobilize the Taiwanese population, overcome the widespread problem of illiteracy, and make the masses receptive to change.

In this paper I would like to address the context in which these three language reform movements have been depicted in contemporary Taiwanese historiography. In so doing, I am particularly interested in engaging with the debate on what drives the historical significance of events, what we deem important to study in the past. It is one of the key questions in the historical discipline, and I am engaging here with a debate
that I came across in Howard Zinn’s work, *The Politics of History*.\(^1\) In the chapter *The Historians*, the author ventures in a discussion of historians encouraging a presentist purpose versus the pursuit of a past-mindedness in the historical profession. Zinn argues that the criterion for what gives historical events significance or meaning is not the event themselves, nor is it subsequent events (as suggested by Carl Degler), but present events or contemporary problems.\(^2\) Present events determine what is important to study in the past.\(^3\)

**General Characteristics of Taiwanese historiography**

Retrocession and the regime change to the KMT rule in 1945 implied the construction of a new master narrative. In the Taiwanese context, this meant the transition from a colonial to a postcolonial historiography. The new rulers did not interpret the writing of history in postcolonial, but in national terms. The Republican paradigm of Chinese history writing was part of the cultural repertoire that the KMT government implemented in Taiwan. In conformity with Chinese traditional historiography, the incorporation of Taiwan as a Province of the ROC required the compilation of a “Local History”. The re-writing of “Taiwan Local History” had to comply with continuity of the orthodox Chinese past and preserving the notion of “Greater China”. In this orthodox representation Taiwan's local history was treated as part of the broad context of traditional Chinese cultural, historical, and geographical development.

Written in a tradition that purported Han Chinese ideology, Taiwanese aboriginal peoples were placed in the larger context of Chinese civilization.\(^4\) As for Taiwan's development during the two hundred years of Qing rule (1684-1895), the emphasis was on describing how the island developed the characteristics of a Han-Chinese society according to the Chinese model. The Han-Chinese migrants-farmers, hailing from the two coastal provinces of Fujian and Guandong, tilled the land. The

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1. It is a 1970s publication in which the author urges for a value-laden historiography, i.e. radical history. This makes sense against the background of the late 1960s Black riots and Vietnam War in the United States.
2. See, pp. 299-300
3. The example in the book refers to a peculiar fact in American history; “the 1832 Nullification movement in South Carolina is important because there was a subsequent secession movement in 1860, whereas the New England secession movements of 1804 and 1814 are not important because there was no subsequent event to give them importance.” Zinn then argues, “What Degler overlooks is that it is not the 1860 secession movement that makes the 1832 Nullification movement important, but various problems of today (race, politics, separation, federalism) which makes the 1860 secession important.” (cited on p. 300)
4. For a recent discussion and critical examination, see Emma Teng’s work on Taiwan’s imagined Geography (2004).
mandarin bureaucrats stationed on the island institutionalised Chinese cultural life and were presented as heroic figures. The emphasis on the heroic deeds of the bureaucracy was not intended to downplay the role of the emerging local elite in the maintenance and further socio-cultural expansion of society, but was in total conformity with Chinese perceptions of traditional historiography.

This “selective” Chinese tradition is particularly illustrative in the historical narrative of the Japanese colonial period (1895-1945). It propagated the basic idea that the Han people in Taiwan engaged in an active anti-Japanese resistance with the goal to preserve Chinese culture in Taiwan and longing for being united with China. Research on the colonial period was not put in a “Taiwan” context as part of the Japanese empire but explained and interpreted in a China KMT context. The reality was that Taiwan's past was being rewritten in an ideological frame void of any facts and events that might imply or lend supporting evidence to a possible accentuation of separation with the Chinese past, glimpses of Taiwanese independence and allegiances with the former colonial rulers. The complexity of anti-colonial political ideologies and strategies was oversimplified, and any mention of radical leftist anti-colonialism was avoided. The rising spirit of Chinese nationalism became a yardstick determining the ideological foundations of the “Taiwan Nationalist Movement” (Taiwan Minzu yundong), and defined the “Who's who” list of the colonial period. Colonial figures who subscribed to the Chinese cause, often those who during the 1920s left Taiwan for China, became heroes. In contrast, others who had sympathized with the so-called cultural separation of Taiwan from the mainland in the 1930s were stigmatised. As has been pointed out by Hsiao A-chin, “before the mid-1980s a typical historical narrative of the Taiwanese anti-Japanese Movement, especially those published by the party and the government would begin with the pre-1920s armed uprising, followed by a brief description of the reformist anti-colonial movement. Then it would jump to the subject of the determination of the Chinese revolutionaries, led by Sun Yat-sen, to recover Taiwan from the Japanese and the contribution to this end made by the KMT-government”. By no means, studies of Taiwanese society and culture could deviate from the pro-China view and belonged primarily in the domain of China's local histories. Published as “local history”, these
writings were considered as an amateur-intellectual pass time and not instructed at an academic level. It was everything but in the national interest to nurture an historical consciousness that drew on Taiwan's past. This officially state sanctioned narrative is also known as the Sino-centric interpretation.

It is also within this line of writing that we have to access the postcolonial historiography on the three colonial language reform movements, i.e. the Mandarin baihuawen movement, Written Taiwanese movement and the Romanization movement. The earliest body of literature dealing with the language issue was mainly compiled by literary figures who had lived through the colonial period. It was published in the local history journals throughout the 1950s and early 1960s. Defined as “script reform movements” (wenzi gaige yundong), the analysis tends to emphasize language reform in colonial Taiwan as a merely linguistic problem, rather than an ideological issue. These early articles, often autobiographical, describe an amalgam of topics on the inception and development of Mandarin baihuawen writing in Taiwan during the colonial period. A profound discussion of the Written Taiwanese Movement was relegated to the second plan. It was explained in the context of an unfortunate aberration of colonial rule that took place in the beginning of the 1930s, and any possible connection with the Mandarin Baihuawen movement was blurred. This was done by inserting a discussion of the Romanization movement. In retrospect, these early articles constitute valuable testimonies to what is presently known as the Taiwan New Literature Movement (Taiwan xinwenxue yundong).

It was generally acknowledged that the three language reform movements were part of the anti-Japanese resistance movement, and in particular a reaction against the Japanese colonial policies of assimilation. The body of Japanese cultural policies was aimed at transforming Taiwanese society into loyal and obedient subjects of the Japanese empire.\(^5\) The significance of the Japanese language in transforming society was understood from the early start. Between 50 and 75 per cent of teaching was devoted to Japanese language instruction. Therefore, the academic discussion on colonial education has long been dominated by studies on Japanese language

\(^5\) As has been shown by E.P. Tsurumi, education was the vehicle for the assimilation policy.
instruction and the expansion of the colonial school-system in Taiwan. Wu Wen-hsing was amongst the first historians who provided a discussion of the language reform movements within the wider context of the Japanese educational policy, i.e. touches on the correlation between education and language in the colonial setting. In recent years, the scope of research on colonial education has known a vigorous expansion.6

Research conducted by Western scholars on the issue of language reform in the colonial period likewise favoured taking the modern Chinese literature perspective. One example is Stephanie Elies' published dissertation on the socio-cultural impact of the China May Fourth Movement in colonial Taiwan. In contrast to her well-founded discussion on the impact of the anti-Confucian movement, her treatment of the two main language reform movements tends to be buried in a long descriptive expose on the development of Taiwanese literary journals and a discussion of Taiwanese colonial literary figures. Elies' contribution to the corpus of Taiwan's literary historiography still emphasizes the concept of “ROC Chinese literature”, and takes a hands-off stand towards a local perspective (bentu) of a Taiwanese literary development which has produced its own characteristics and insists on being treated as an independent cultural phenomenon.

Douglas Fix’s work pioneers in his evaluation of the 1930s literary developments put in a Taiwan centred context. By analysing how Taiwanese writers created a new local literature written in vernacular Taiwanese and tied to popular culture, his work has articulated a distinct Taiwanese identity. Unlike others dealing with language reform in colonial Taiwan, Fix has attempted to phrase his findings on the narrative of Taiwanese identity construction in a colonial modernity framework. His approach, influenced by the model of subaltern studies is noteworthy in two aspects. It demonstrates a beginning of focused, theory-oriented studies on the issue of the historical development of Taiwanese nationalism, and at the same time warns us about operational limitations stemming from cultural specificities and origins of theoretical frameworks.

6 Relevant to this subject matter is that some scholars are now looking at the instruction of hanwen and Taiwanese during the colonial period.
Hsiao A-chin’s published dissertation on the formation of contemporary Taiwanese cultural nationalism has integrated a discussion of Taiwanese literary and linguistic reforms under Japanese colonial rule. Drawing on the method of discourse analysis, his study examines how the concept of “Taiwanese nation” has been crafted discursively by pro-independence humanist intellectuals. His treatment of the 1920s and 1930s language reform movements briefly touches upon the role of language as an essential part of modern nation-state ideology. Central to Hsiao’s argumentation is the severance in Taiwan-China cultural relations as a decisive factor in 1930s concern for the distinctiveness of a Taiwan local culture. His discussion of the Romanization movement is another example of the sino-centric attitude towards the roman script. Hsiao concludes that Taiwanese opposition to the Romanization movement demonstrated the preservation of Han cultural identity on the island. Hsiao further sees the 1930s insistence on using Chinese characters in the Written Taiwanese movement as an expression of this Han Chinese cultural identity, driven by maintaining cultural ties with China. Hsiao does not elaborate how the 1930s controversy over the construction of a Written Taiwanese and the continuation of Mandarin baihuawen dealt with defining these cultural ties. In view of the politicisation of Han cultural identity in post-war Taiwanese social and intellectual circles, his work is a first attempt in presenting a fairly objective evaluation.

Wu Weiren’s dissertation builds on the theoretical culturalist approach. My argument is that historical research dealing with Chinese language reform has focused on Taiwan from a Mainland Chinese pattern of development. Consequently, the linguistic reality of the island, notably the fact that Taiwanese historico-linguistic development was centred round the Southern Min vernacular has been to a great extent underestimated if not overlooked. Henning Kloter’s publication adds a linguistic dimension to the colonial debate on language reform.

Counter-narrative and challenge to the Sino-centric or pro-China version is the emergence of the Taiwan-centric interpretation, and which did not come into full swing until the late 1980s. This alternative interpretation resulted from roughly two

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decades of increasingly publicly expressed forms of antagonism and contestation with the ruling powers. Since the end of the 1980s, “Taiwanese consciousness” came to dominate the cultural discourse. Some intellectuals steered away from the KMT official version that the Taiwan Nationalist Movement was an anti-Japanese resistance movement entrenched in Chinese patriotism. Instead, they linked anti-Japanese resistance with the awakening of a Taiwanese consciousness, drawing the attention to the relationship between modernization and Japanese colonization in Taiwan.

The resurgence of “Nativist Fiction” (xiangtu wenxue) since the late 1970s renewed the interest in the 1930s literary developments in Taiwan. Research on the Taiwan New Literature Movement integrated the literary endeavours in Taiwanese (Minnan) and incorporated a discussion of its socio-political background. At the same time, it marked the start of a constructive effort to document the linguistic map of Taiwan. More importantly, a strong impetus came from scholars working on Taiwanese living abroad, in particular Wang Yude's (Ō Ikutoku) in Japan and Robert Cheng (Tēⁿ Liông-ūi) based in Hawaii. Progressive academics and intellectuals held symposia to discuss the standardization of Taiwanese, and worked towards the creation of a “literary Taiwanese”. In this more open social atmosphere, graduate students literally discovered the roots of their mother tongue.

The political radicalization need not be ignored. In as much as earlier scholarship on Taiwan's past was set in a Chinese context, the pendulum swung to the other side in that Taiwan related subjects often served the Taiwanese identity cause. In doing so, it became the favourite topic of pro-Taiwanese writers and intellectuals. To generate popular support for a modern Written Taiwanese, also called Taibun, articles and essays were published in Taiwanese rather than Mandarin Chinese. This Taiwanese language activism is currently in full play, and operating on the national level in policy and planning.

**Close-Up on the Romanisation Movement**

Historiographical writing on the recent past has been susceptible to the identity driven market. Bringing the recent past to life, absorbing its experience and
canonizing its memory turned into a nationalist agenda for power in its own right. In brief, Taiwanese historians, social scientists and linguists embarked on a nationwide project that emphasized the centrality of the home-repertoire in a national identification with Taiwan. I would like to illustrate this with the example of the Romanisation movement and how this peculiar expression of linguistic activism has been integrated in the representation of its advocate Cai Peihuo in biographical essays.

Intrinsically linked to the tradition of Chinese historiography are biographical essays of distinguished personalities. One of the first biographical collections on Taiwanese distinguished personalities appeared in 1976 entitled Record of Distinguished Taiwanese [Taiwan mingren chuan]. In compliance with the ROC national myth, its chronology went back as far as to the beginning of the seventeenth century when Taiwan was a Dutch trading post (1624-1662), before Taiwan was incorporated as a prefecture of Fujian province in 1684. Continuity in the listing of eminent Chinese after 1895 was assured by including late Qing Taiwan-born literati and rebels whose public life and writings were either exemplar of anti-Japanese resistance activities, anchored in traditional values of the Confucian state, and post-1911 KMT partisanship. And the politically correct line emphasized the centrality of an anti-imperialist, anti-socialist and above all anti-communist rhetoric. These were the truthful criteria that delineated the selection of the nationalist stereotypes in modern Taiwanese biography, and which, as observed by Wang Gungwu in his research on Chinese biography, upheld its didactic purpose: to denote the historical place of the respectable dead for future history writing.

In view of this, Cai Peihuo’s first biographical portrait was published in 1984 in the collection entitled One Hundred Distinguished Taiwanese [Taiwan yibai wei mingren chuan] as the ninety-ninth entry. This particular collection of essays was based on the oral history account by Lin Hengdao, one of main local forces in the

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8 Lin Li, Taiwan mingren chuan [Record of Distinguished Taiwanese] (Taipei: Xinya Chuban, 1976)
“Historical Research Commission of Taiwan Province”. Similar to the other entries, the biography started by referring to Cai’s jiguan (paternal clan) in Fujian, Quanzhou, and includes the family’s brief return to the mainland following the Japanese take over. The biography then describes Cai’s engagement in the home front mobilization movement, as illustrated in the *History of the Nationalist Movement*, emphasizes his outspoken opposition to any sort of leftwing ideology, and finally, refers to his close friendship with Lin Xiantang and Yanaihara Tadao. Mention is made of Cai’s conversion to Christianity: “While studying in Japan, he became a staunch Christian”. But Cai’s patriotism was also kind of problematic; his linguistic activism for the promotion of romanised Taiwanese throughout the 1920s and early 1930s cast a dark shadow and was highly controversial in postwar KMT ideology. Latinization was associated with Chinese communist efforts of language reform in the 1930s and continued after the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was established with the 1950s hanyu pinyin transliteration program under Mao Zedong. Therefore, the essay made specific mention that after retrocession, the Taiwan Provincial Central Government Committee warned Cai to give up any further attempts in that direction, and noted “from then on he abandoned his thinking on Taiwanese dialect latinization, and switched to the well-established Mandarin Phonetic Symbols (guoyu zhuyin fuhao), in which he compiled the *Basic Chinese-Taiwanese Dictionary* [Guoyu- Minnanyu duizhao changyong cidian] and *The Three Principles of the People in Southern Min Transliteration* [Minnanyu zhuyin sanminzhuyi]”. Cai’s commemoration as a respectable dead and his contribution to future history was summarized as a “flexible man, someone not afraid to reform”.  

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11 For a reflection on his involvement, see Chen San-Ching, Hsu Hsueh-Chi and Yang Ming-Che (ed) *Lin Hengdao xiansheng. Fangwen jilu* [The reminiscences of Mr. Lin Heng-Tao] (Oral History Series No 42. Taipei: Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica, 1992), 107-124.  
12 *Lin Hengdao and Hong Jifu* (ed) Taiwan yibai wei mingren chuan, 402.  
13 The essay glossed “Minnanyu ladinghua”, which translates as “latinization of the Southern Min dialect” instead of “luomazi” (Romanization), *ibid.*, 402.  
16 *Lin Hengdao and Hong Jifu* (ed) Taiwan yibai wei mingren chuan, 403.
Another biographical essay of Cai Peihuo, published in 1987 in the series *Distinguished Personalities in Modern Taiwan History [Taiwan jindai mingren zhi]* picked up on that same virtue and crafted Cai as “A Flexible Politician in Times of Crisis”. Although only three years separated these two biographies, nonetheless, the nuances in the ideological contours are striking. Whereas Lin Hengdao’s biographical essay still perpetuated the orthodox KMT line, the edited volumes by historian Chang Yen-Hsien in 1987 are representative of the KMT contesting narrative, known as the Taiwan-centric approach to history on the colonial period. Missing from the picture is the background rhetoric drawing the reader’s attention to the evil rule of the Japanese and the frequent localization of Taiwan as “this province” and China as “our country”. Instead, the essay centralizes the workings of the overseas student activists in Tokyo, its transfer to Taiwan in the mid 1920s and the further development of its political activism and local factionalism into the 1930s through the spectrum of Cai Peihuo’s involvement. Cai emerges as the driving force behind the establishment and management of the Taiwanese-run paper, the derailment of the Petition Movement for a Taiwan Parliament League. The essay interweaves the different stages of his linguistic activism throughout the 1920s and 1930s into the narrative. Citations from his article contributions in the Taiwanese paper are inserted, together with pictures, sources of reference and a chronology (nianbiao). The conventional understanding of the profound influence of the Republican Chinese May Fourth Movement has a counter narrative: interaction with and recognition of Japanese metropolitan liberalism and its colonialist ideology in the formulation of the Taiwanese intellectual discourse. Accordingly, the essay furthers the link between the 1914 Assimilation Society and Cai’s polemical writings in the 1920s in which he places the Japanese assimilation policy under close scrutiny. Furthermore, the selective assessment of Cai’s postcolonial public career includes references to the deep-seated cultural, social and linguistic cleavages which were carried over from the colonial era into the postcolonial period. For instance, the essay cites an extract from the preface of Cai’s 1976 publication *The Three Principles of the People in Southern Min Transliteration*


in which Cai problematized the language barriers between Mandarin Chinese and Taiwanese speakers after the regime change.\textsuperscript{19}

Of relevance is the setting of the biographical collection and its date of publication. First, the five volumes with a total of 100 biographical entries cover Taiwanese firsts and bests of the Japanese colonial period.\textsuperscript{20} Second, the collection was written at a time when the intellectual debate on Taiwanese versus Chinese consciousness \textit{(taiwan yishi lunzhan)} was raging across the island and in the process of becoming highly politicized. The editors were a younger generation, for the greater part historians who felt it their duty to draw the colonial past out of its Chinese provincial pigeonholing, generate a public awareness and create a Taiwan-centered moral discourse of the Japanese colonial experience. Therefore, the 1987 biography reveals more about the ideological predispositions of its editors and the burgeoning Taiwan subjectivity penetrating scholarship in the public sphere. This is not to say that the biographies were new in form. The biographical close-up on the colonial period was still in conformity with the interrelatedness between history and biography as a genre in the Chinese tradition. However, the interpretation of their historical place and virtue attuned to the socio-political needs of the immediate environment and constructed a Taiwanese subjectivity, intent on understanding the colonial experience from within and from “below”.

In 1997, philosopher Wang Xiaobo published his collection of biographical essays in the publication \textit{Fifty Years of Taiwanese Anti-Japanese Resistance} \textit{[Taiwan kangri wushi nian]}.\textsuperscript{21} His essay on Cai Peihuo was a reprint of a commemoration first published in the journal \textit{Zongheng} in February 1983, and presented a thematic discussion of Cai’s colonial thought. On Cai’s interest in colonial language reform, Wang wrote: “Only in the Japanese period, Cai Peihuo promoted romanised Taiwanese”, and he illustrated its didactic purpose with a passage from the preface written by Yanaihara Tadao in Cai Peihuo’s 1928 publication \textit{To the Citizens of the

\textsuperscript{19} Xie Dexi, “Cai Peihuo. Bianju xia de rouxing zhengzhijia”, 100-101.
\textsuperscript{20} The first four were published in 1987, the fifth was published in 1990. Contributors were the same.
\textsuperscript{21} Wang Xiaobo, \textit{Taiwan kangri wushi nian} \textit{[Fifty Years of Taiwanese Anti-Japanese Resistance]} (Taipei: Cheng Chung, 1997), 112-131
Japanese Country [Nihon hongokumin ni atafu]\(^\text{22}\) and then commented that “since retrocession, there was no longer a need for a Taiwanese transliteration because the Taiwanese compatriots had embraced the Chinese language which was popularized through the national schools and the Mandarin language learning programs”.\(^\text{23}\) Wang also included a quotation from a 1974 essay in commemoration of Lin Xiantang.\(^\text{24}\) In this essay Cai elaborated upon the distinction between a China and a Taiwan faction in the colonial political movement; the Taiwan faction strove for reform from within Taiwan, whereas the China faction “gave up”, went to the Chinese mainland and put their hope in the Chinese cause.\(^\text{25}\) Wang’s interpretative comment read: “Cai Peihuo belongs to the ‘Taiwan faction’, but at the last moment he ran head over heels away to Chongqing; Jiang Weishui and Zhang Shenqi\(^\text{26}\) belong to the “China faction”, yet they also put all their efforts in resisting, and never “suggested to abandon Taiwan”.\(^\text{27}\) Wang’s immediate concern was not the colonial period, but wrote into the early 1980s debate on national consciousness, and challenged the way in which the emerging postcolonial “Taiwan faction” proponents claimed the Japanese colonial period reiterated the ethno-national distinction between a Taiwanese and a Chinese consciousness.\(^\text{28}\)

Finally, a brief mention deserves Su Jinqiang’s *A man of Moral Strength and Principle. The Biography of Cai Peihuo* [Fenggu linxun de changzhe – Cai Peihuo

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\(^{22}\) To the Citizens of the Japanese Country Toward a basic Solution for the Colonial Problems [Nihon hongokumin ni atafu – Shokuminchi mondai kaiketsu no kichō], (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1928). A Chinese translation was published in Taiwan as [Yu Riben benguo guomin shu – Jiejue zhimin shi zhi jidiao]  (Taiwan: Taiwan kenkyūkai, 1928). Cited in Wang Xiaobo, Taiwan kangri wushi nian, 128.

\(^{23}\) Wang Xiaobo, Taiwan kangri wushi nian, 128


\(^{26}\) Zhang Shenqi (1904-1965) is renowned for his literary achievements. In 1917 Zhang was taken under Lin Xiantang’s patronage and sent to Japan to complete his primary education, and where he also continues his secondary and higher education. In the early 1920s Zhang goes to China and becomes involved with the leftwing Taiwanese student movement in several Chinese cities. Alternating his activism between Taiwan and China, with in between a two year prison sentence (1927-1930), he finally leaves Taiwan in 1938 for China. He returns to Taiwan in 1946 and is appointed Chinese language teacher in the Taizhong normal school. In the wake of the February 28 Incident in 1947, Zhang spent several months hiding in the mountains. After that he withdrew from public life, furthered his literary career but remained under close supervision of the KMT.

\(^{27}\) Wang Xiaobo, Taiwan kangri wushi nian, 129.

\(^{28}\) The full account of Wang’s theorizing is included in Wang Xiaobo, Taiwan lishi yu taiwanren, 23-67. For a discussion, see Leo Ching, *Becoming Japanese, Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation* (Berkeley: California University Press, 2001), 62-67.
In 1990 in the series “Biographies of National Martyrs and Ancient Sages” published by Modern China Publishing Co. In Taiwan, this series was known for its biographies of famous Chinese Republicans, revolutionary rebel-reformers, and the handful of Taiwanese compatriots whose life trajectory mirrored commitment to the Chinese Republican cause. As this suggests, the biography reads in line with the traditional eulogy of a KMT nationalist narrative on the Japanese colonial period, but has some interesting accommodating stances towards Taiwan subjectivity. First, the biography features Cai’s life story until retrocession, and the contextual references demonstrate that the biographer has done his share of politically correct ‘Taiwan history’ background reading, concurrent with the late 1980s Zeitgeist of contesting interpretations. Second, Su Jinqiang does make an effort to present a lively story. He interchanges plain narrative with dialogue, and interweaves Taiwanese lexicon to recall the spirit of the time. Yet, not one word is mentioned about Cai’s interest in language reform in the colonial period and in the final chapter, “Passionate about the Fatherland” (Re ai zuguo), Su only briefly refers to Cai’s Basic Chinese-Taiwanese Dictionary as a compromising gesture towards the language barriers between the Taiwanese islanders and the mainland immigres.

What about the Comics?

Taiwan history comics are a recent phenomenon, and write directly into the post-martial Taiwan-centric (‘revision’) rhetoric. Let us have a brief look at one of the

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30 The series included Lian Yatang (1878-1936), Cai Huiru (1881-1929) and Weng Yiming (1892-1943) as examples of Taiwanese who complied with the Chinese Republican cause. Lian Yatang is KMT politician Lian Chan’s grandfather. Cai Huiru is linked to the initial establishment of Taiwanese student activism in China (Beijing 1922 and Shanghai 1923) and driving force in the Tokyo Shinbinhoe for aligning with the Chinese cause. Weng Yiming graduated from medical school in Tainan, but left for Xiamen in 1916 and became one of the founding members of the KMT in Fuzhou in 1943.

31 Most of the references were taken from the mainstream local history repertoire, but the bibliography also included some of the late 1980s publications which depict the beginning transition from a reliance on Sino-centric to an acknowledgment of a Taiwan-centric interpretation. Examples are Wu Wen-Hsing’s doctoral thesis completed in 1986 at National Taiwan Normal University, Department of History, entitled “Social Leadership Class in Taiwan during the Japanese Colonial Period” [Rijushiqí tàiwān shèhuì lǐngdǎo jícèng zhì yánjiū], Lu Xiuyi’s The History of the Taiwan Communist Party in Colonial Taiwan [Riju shídài Taiwan gōngchǎngdǎng shì], published in 1988 by the “pro-independent” Qunwei [Avantgarde] publishing house in Taipei; and the socialist-inspired manuscript by Lian Wenqìng (1895-1957), entitled History of the Taiwan Political Movement [Lian Wenqìng zhe – Taiwan Zhèngzhì Yundōngshì], edited by Chang Yen-Hsien and Ang Ka-im, and published in 1988 by Daoxiang in Taipei, 1988.

32 Su Jinqiang, Fenggu linxun de changzhe – Cai Peihuo chuan, 155.
more recent publications. I have taken the series *Manhua Taiwanshi*, volume 8, *The Japanese Era*, part 2: *The Age of Awakening*. The first edition was published in 1998-1999, entirely in Chinese. The second revised edition included an English translation and was published in 2005. The three language reform movements feature in the third chapter “In Search of Taiwan’s Character”. After comparing the two versions, only minor changes appear in the revised edition. The text and dialogues remain largely the same apart from the insert of Taiwanese phrases and an extra educative page that summarises the three language reform movements (p 89). This educative page also introduces Lian Yatang (Lien Heng), Cai Peihuo (Chhoa Pei-hoe) and Guo Qiusheng.

In both versions, the dialogues introduced Mr Huang, with the captions: “I recently took a trip to China and noticed that they are promoting the use of ‘vernacular writing’”… “I was so impressed I had to tell everybody”… “This is indeed interesting. Let’s listen to what Mr Huang has to say.”

No further references to this Mr Huang. Who do the authors mean: Huang Qichao or Huang Chengcong? Both had taken the trip to China and referred to their mainland travel in the articles that they subsequently published in the Taiwan Minpao (at the time still *Tai-Oan Chheng Lian* and *The Formosa*). Only Huang Qichao gained post-event prominence: he entered the world of diplomacy with KMT membership and remained a diplomat in the postcolonial period. However, at the time (1920s especially) Huang Chengcong was the one who was more actively engaged on the local scene in Taiwan.

Nonetheless, the authors could have selected Zhang Wojun rather than one of the two Huangs as the proponent of Mandarin *baihuawen* in Taiwan. But they didn’t. Zhang Wojun is another of the post-event eulogised nationalist heroes: he left Taiwan for mainland permanently in the mid-1920s and his relatives joined the KMT ranks in 1945 in returning to Taiwan. Reference is made to the influence of the May Fourth Literature movement, but it is no longer the predominant issue. Instead, more

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33 Chief editor of the series in Wu Micha. The first series was published by Yuedan. Its revised version by Thirdnature.
emphasis is put on the local colour context: the emergence of Taiwanese language awareness as cultural marker, i.e. “Consequently, from the late 1920s to the early 1930s, these Taiwan visionaries compiled a Taiwanese lexicon” (p. 83). This is coupled to the discovery of Taiwanese culture, i.e. historical authenticity.

“Meanwhile, researchers started fieldwork and collecting existing documents”.. “Did you notice that this temple is built differently from the others?” “So it is! Do you have any idea why the temple was built this way? “No idea. Let’s go inside and ask the caretaker.”(p. 84)

The romanisation movement is mentioned in between:

“Some people started to promote a vernacular writing for Taiwanese instead of Mandarin”..”Although the Taiwanese spoke Taiwanese, there was no written Taiwanese”. “Perhaps we could use Roman letters to spell out sounds and thereby create a Taiwanese writing system”. “Right! We could use foreign pronunciation symbols to spell out our own tongue. That way we’ll have our own written language”.. “Not a bad idea, but instead of using foreign letters, why not use Chinese characters?” “I think we should start putting together popular sayings and poems”. (pp. 81-82)

Discussion

If it is present concern or contemporary problems that give historical events significance, and not so much subsequent events, how can we frame this in the Taiwan context? The reality of subsequent events was that Japanese colonial rule had disappeared and the regime change to KMT that implemented its new rules and ideologies. This is visible in the three language movements. First, the emphasis of the Mandarin baihuawen movement was confirming to the 1960s – 1970s ideology that underscored consolidation of the Mandarin-only policy. The role of Mandarin was framed in the context of the May Fourth Movement and its influence on the first generation of Japanese-educated Taiwanese. This kind of rhetoric fit precisely the ideological line of anti-Japanese resistance. The promotion of Mandarin baihuawen
and the rise of Chinese nationalism was carried over to Taiwan and symbolised Taiwanese resistance to the Japanese imposed cultural assimilation and policies of linguistic centralisation. These ideas were also mirrored in early published versions of (auto)-biographical writings, i.e. the life stories of Zhang Wojun and Huang Qichao. Noteworthy, the public careers of Zhang and Huang were in line with those of the KMT political echelons in the post-period. Hence, it was not the subsequent event that Mandarin became the new national language in postwar Taiwan, but the fact that it was important to emphasise its continuity from the colonial into the postcolonial period.

Second, the context in which the Written Taiwanese language movement is framed responds to the current methodological approaches that are fashionable in rewriting Taiwan history. I am referring here to the ‘from within and from below’ interpretation and identification with the Taiwan subjectivity. The interpretation of the Taiwanese consciousness movement focuses the ‘local colour’ that characterised the 1930s arts and cultural scene. The last decade Taiwanese society has been witnessing a revival of this local colour trend, and not coincidentally this revival largely draws on the visualisation and commemoration of the recent past. The difference with the pro-China view (Sino-centric) is that the emergence of the colonial bentu movement is no longer presented as an integral part of the anti-Japanese movement, but ascribes to the image of seeking cultural autonomy. Hence, the special page on the Taiwanese language movement, and the emphasis on Taiwanese as the mother tongue in contradistinction to Mandarin.

Finally, the significance of the romanisation movement remains clustered in a dubious state of cultural relevance. Likewise the importance attached to Lien Heng’s Taiwanese Dictionary and General History of Taiwan, both works compiled during the colonial period. What the comics say thus reflects a popular version of the academic history writing on the language reform movements in colonial Taiwan.