

Lin Chu-mei 林初梅 / Yoshida Shingo 吉田真悟: T'ai-wan Hua-yü 台灣華語 [Taiwanese Mandarin]

Osaka 大阪: Osaka University Press 大阪大學出版會, 2022. 233 pp., 2600 Yen (plus taxes). Also available in electronic form.

Review by Thilo Diefenbach

I have to admit this is the first time that I write a review about a book which is mostly written in a language I cannot understand. This textbook, consisting of 30 lessons, was written for Japanese students and is meant to teach them not only some specifics about Taiwanese Mandarin (in comparison with the “standard language/ *putonghua* 普通話” spoken in China), but also about the languages and writing systems of Taiwan in general, as well as the historical, cultural and political background of Taiwan’s current linguistic situation. This means, of course, that all of the commentaries and grammatical explanations are written in Japanese and therefore incomprehensible to me. The reason why I write this review in spite of this is that I can at least understand the main text of each lesson since it is written in (Taiwanese) Mandarin. And it is exactly because of the highly informative content of these lessons that I want to recommend this book to Europeans who are interested in the languages of Taiwan.

This book is No. 18 in a series which presents languages from all over the world (No. 2 being, by the way, dedicated to “*Zhongguo yu* 中國語”, which might be understood as “The languages of China”, but in reality is supposed to mean “Chinese Mandarin”). It consists of three parts. The first one introduces the historical background of Taiwan’s language situation from prehistoric times until today, the second part aims to define and explain the characteristics of “Taiwanese Mandarin”, and the third part provides more details about Taiwan’s multilingual and multicultural landscape, for example the various ways in which the different languages—aboriginal idioms, Taiwanese 台語, Hakka 客語, Japanese 日語—influenced each other.

Two thirds of the 30 lessons were authored by Lin Chu-mei 林初梅, a Taiwanese professor teaching at the Department of Languages and Cultures at Osaka University. While she provides a kind of “insider’s view”, her Japanese co-author Yoshida Shingo 吉田真悟 (who used to teach at the same department as Lin before changing to Hitotsubashi University 一橋大學) often describes his experiences with the languages of Taiwan from his viewpoint as a foreigner. The fact that both authors regularly mention their personal experiences, be it from their everyday life or from their field trips, adds to the liveliness of the lessons. After each text, the authors provide a vocabulary list that contains the meaning and the pronunciation of certain words, which is especially helpful since they always point

out differences between Taiwanese and Chinese Mandarin, for example for the word 夾帶: *jiádài* in Taiwan, *jiādài* in China. They also mark colloquial 俗 pronunciations common in Taiwan, such as *piànjí* instead of *biànjí* 遍及.

Just in order to give an impression of the range of topics touched upon by the authors: lesson No. 2 offers an insight into the different dialects of Taiwanese and Hakka, No. 3 and 4 explore the connection between language and identity in Taiwan, No. 6 explains the history and language situation of those aboriginal tribes that are known as “lowlanders 平埔族”, and No. 10 even informs us about the growing importance of Taiwanese languages in the curriculum for national schools at the elementary level: since the latest reform, carried out in 2019, pupils from the 1st until the 6th grade have been able to choose one of Taiwan’s “local languages 本土語言” or one of the “languages of new immigrants 新住民語言” such as Vietnamese, Thai or Indonesian. This chapter is especially interesting since it demonstrates how languages other than Mandarin, after a long period of marginalization and neglect, gradually have increased in importance and today even enjoy governmental support. Some chapters in the second part of the book introduce the various writing systems that were or are used in Taiwan, including the Mandarin Phonetic Symbols 注音符號, also known as Bopomofo ㄅㄆㄇㄏ (lesson No. 14). No. 16 then goes on to explain the reasons for the sometimes confusing multitude of transcription methods for Mandarin which, for example, can often be found on street signs or shop signs. No. 19 introduces some specimen of current “internet slang 網路語言”, which is influenced both by Taiwanese and Japanese. One of the most fascinating lessons is No. 20, which shows how much Taiwanese and Chinese Mandarin may differ when it comes to translations. Here, Professor Lin offers some photographs which show that in Japan, texts in public places (stores, monuments, train stations) are sometimes translated into two kinds of written Mandarin — simplified characters (used in China and some other countries such as Singapore and Malaysia) and traditional ones (used in Taiwan and Hongkong). The surprising detail is that these translations differ not only in their set of characters, but also in style, expression and tone. For example, the Japanese phrase “Pets allowed” reads “You can take your pets inside 可攜帶寵物” in the simplified version and “Your pets may accompany you 寵物可以隨行” in the traditional writing system, indicating that animals are seen as a mere “thing” in China, but as a companion in Taiwan. Other chapters are dedicated to the Taiwanese language and its writing systems, such as the one known as Pêh-ōe-jī or Church romanization (No. 21). When written with Sinitic Characters, Taiwanese sometimes can be downright funny, for example in the phrase 蛙愛呆玩, which to the uninitiated seems to mean “frogs like to play foolishly”, while in reality it is supposed to mean “I love Taiwan”! Lesson No. 23 explains why television programs in Taiwan are almost always equipped with subtitles in Mandarin (but nearly never in Taiwanese), and No. 25 analyzes the different terms that can be used for Taiwanese (T’ai-yü 台語, Min-nan 閩南, Ho-lo 河洛 / 鶴佬 / 福佬). Nos. 26, 27

and 28 are three lessons that actually do require a certain knowledge of Japanese since they name some examples for Taiwanese and Taiwanese Mandarin words that derive from Japanese vocabulary. The same is true for lesson 29, where we get to know about the so-called Yilan creole 宜蘭克里奧語, a mixture of Japanese and Atayal. And finally, lesson No. 30 describes the role of the “languages of new immigrants” in today’s Taiwan in more detail.

The book also contains a brochure with Japanese translations of all lesson texts and a QR code that leads to a website on which all 30 lessons are read out in flawless Taiwanese Mandarin.

It is to be hoped that this very useful and interesting book will be translated into one or more European languages soon, even though it might also be put to good use in European seminars in its original form. However, teachers should be aware that the lessons do have a certain level of difficulty and are definitely only suitable for students who have a solid knowledge of Mandarin, China and Taiwan. For them, this book will prove extremely valuable.

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