

The Meaning Contestation of *Tai*: Language Ideologies and the Global-Local Ambivalence*

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This study investigates a newly emergent Taiwan Mandarin slang term *taike* and its derivative adjective *tai*. *Taike* evokes a cultural stereotype of young Taiwanese adults whose lifestyle, linguistic repertoire, and fashion sense are considered distinctively local and unsuccessfully imitative of current trends, but the term has also been appropriated to index local identity and nonconformity. Drawing on data from 344 questionnaires, this study explores the ways the two terms interact with language ideologies and ideologies concerning localism, cosmopolitanism, and authenticity in Taiwan. Statistical results indicate current attitudes toward the terms in Northern Taiwan tend to be negative, with females, the higher-educated, and the younger evaluating the terms more negatively than their counterparts. Further exploration of the data indicates that the meaning contestation is ultimately associated with the global-local ambivalence prevalent in contemporary Taiwan.

Keywords: *taike*, sociolinguistics, language ideologies, meaning contestation, Taiwan

1. Introduction

I first heard the term *taike* (台客) in 2002 when I, then a doctoral student at an American university, was back to Taiwan and was about to begin sociolinguistic fieldwork on two college campuses in Taipei and Tainan. At that time, *taike* was regarded as a newly emergent youth slang term and was used by some of my informants to label young adults whose lifestyle and linguistic behavior were perceived as distinctively local, unknowingly unsophisticated, and unsuccessfully imitative of current fashion trends.¹ I was immediately intrigued by this term for a number of reasons. First, the circulating discourses about *taike* touched upon a wide range of social and linguistic practices which were so familiar and uniquely local, but the connection between those practices had never been expressed so explicitly before. Second, while the *taike* discourses were meant to be light-hearted and funny, they were also obviously pejorative. But why were Taiwanese taking *taike*, literally “Taiwanese visitor/person”, and the adjective derived from it, *tai*, as derogatory terms?

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¹ As I indicate later in the paper, the term *taike* has been in use for several decades in a more limited context but has re-emerged as a popular slang term at the turn of this century. The descriptions of *taike* in this paper refer to the later usage.

Was this some kind of unconscious self-mocking?

Since then I have been keeping a close eye on the development of this term. In 2002, most of the *taike* discourses were initially circulated on the Internet and took the form of jokes or humorous remarks on a familiar *other*. The popularity of the term mounted to a climax in 2004 and 2005 when a number of TV talk shows, most notably *Liangdai dianli gongsi* (兩代電力公司), began to air a series of episodes on *taike*. Though those labeled or self-identified in those shows as *taike* were often made fun of, they also constructed a daring and straightforward image. In August 2005, in an attempt to reclaim the term, the *Taike yaogun yanchanghui* (台客搖滾演唱會) ‘Taike Rock’n’ Roll Concert’ was held, in which some high-profile singers appropriated the term to claim local identity and nonconformity. This and other reclamation attempts induced a discursive shift on the meaning of *taike*, but not everyone evaluated the attempts positively. Also in August 2005, a number of political organizations held a joint press conference and called for an abandonment of the term *taike*. They argued that though the reclamation attempts served to repackage the term into something consumable and trendy, there had not been any substantial change in the self-degrading nature of the term.²

These disparate attitudes induced many fierce debates evolving *taike* from youth slang into a politicized term known by members of a wider range of generations. Now, several years after its prime, *taike* jokes are seldom heard, but the discourse has taken a different course. *Tai*, an adjective derived from *taike*, has developed into a common descriptor in everyday language in comments like “That’s so *tai*.” Situated in this social and temporal context, this study explores current attitudes toward *tai* and *taike* after the heat of the controversy has cooled down and the related attitudes have slipped into everyday language use. Specifically, the study asks the following questions:

1. To what extent does language play a role in the *taike* stereotype?
2. What are the current attitudes toward *tai*-ness across different social groups after the fierce meaning struggle?
3. What does *tai*-ness reveal about the ideologies concerning language, localness, globalness, and authenticity?

Three hundred and forty four questionnaires were collected in northern Taiwan between 2008 and 2010 and were analyzed quantitatively. The interviews that I conducted during earlier fieldwork (between 2002 and 2004 and in Taipei and Tainan) were also drawn on to trace the development of the meaning of *tai* and *taike*.

The remaining part of the paper is structured as follows: A more detailed account

² See Lai (2006:6) for a summary of the development of *taike* and related events between 2000 and 2006.

of the history of *taike* and *tai* is first provided, followed by the review of relevant studies and theoretical frameworks. Then the analysis of the data and the discussion of the results are presented.

2. *Taike*: What does it refer to?

The term *taike* is composed of two morphemes, *tai* and *ke*. *Tai* is the abbreviation of *Taiwan*. *Ke* has two main meanings according to the Kangxi Dictionary. One is “a guest”; the other is “a visitor”, that is, anyone who comes from another place, welcomed or not, could be called a *ke*.

A number of sources (Lai 2006; Xie 2006; Zheng 2003) have indicated that the term *taike* existed in Taiwan before its emergence as a popular youth slang term in the early years of the 21st century. The term was said to be used by young *waishengren* (hereafter mainlander) gangsters in the 60’s and 70’s to refer to *benshengren* gangsters, of whose lifestyle and taste they disapproved.³ In the 80’s, *taike* was used sporadically in news report as an abbreviation of *Taiwan lüke* ‘Taiwanese tourists.’ By the early years of this millennium, however, the term had emerged to refer to any young man with a distinctively local and showy lifestyle. Wang (2007) summarizes a mass of online *taike* discourses in 2004 and 2005 and sorts out four major defining characteristics: fashion senses, linguistic practices, behavior/conduct, and mentality. *Taike* is most frequently suggested to be someone who mixes inconsistent stylistic elements and has an outdated fashion sense, who exaggerates and is showy, who pretends to know things that he actually doesn’t know, and who swears and speaks *Taiwan guoyu* (hereafter Taiwanese-accented Mandarin).⁴

Another method of defining *taike* is to compare it with other contrastive groups. My fieldwork between 2002 and 2004 identified three explicit or implicit contrastive

³ For readers not familiar with the sociolinguistic background of Taiwan, among the Taiwanese population, a common distinction is made between *benshengren* and *waishengren*. An approximate translation would be ‘the locals’ and ‘the mainlanders’, respectively. *Benshengren* literally means ‘this-province-people’, which commonly refers to descendents of the settlers from the southeast coast of China between the 17th and 19th centuries. Most of the early settlers spoke either dialects of Southern Min (a.k.a. Hokkien, which is commonly referred to as Taiwanese today), or Hakka. *Waishengren* literally means ‘out-province-people’, which commonly refers to the immigrants from all over China between 1945 and 1949 and their descendents. In 1945, Taiwan was returned to Chinese rule from Japan as a conclusion of the Second World War. In 1948, the Chinese Nationalist government (or KMT) was defeated in the civil war against Chinese communists and retreated to Taiwan, which induced a sudden and massive wave of immigration. The mainlanders did not share a common mother tongue, but used various forms of Mandarin, or *guoyu* (literally ‘the national language’) as lingua franca. The tension between *benshengren* and *waishengren* has been a major part of Taiwanese politics since then.

⁴ The *Taiwan guoyu* here refers to the social and linguistic stereotype of non-standard Mandarin prevalent among the lay people in Taiwan. It does not refer to the more neutral usage of ‘the Mandarin spoken in Taiwan’ in linguistic studies. I choose to translate it as ‘Taiwanese-accented Mandarin’ rather than ‘Taiwan Mandarin’ or ‘Taiwanese Mandarin’ to avoid confusion of the two senses of *Taiwan guoyu*.

groups in *taike* discourses produced by the college students that I worked with. The most obvious one is *taike*; the second is the circulators of *taike* discourse, who distinguish themselves from *taike*. The third group is not always explicitly invoked, but is sometimes constructed as a contrast to *taike* and can be termed ‘authentic Taiwanese.’ Members of this group share with *taike* the image of localness, but are often positively portrayed as older local figures who do not seek to be someone they are not.

The original *taike* discourses all center on mocking a familiar *other*, but as aforementioned, in around 2005, some reclamation attempts managed to induce some degree of discursive shift in the meaning of *taike*. In addition to the aforementioned *Taike* Rock’n Roll concert, in which well-known singers such as Wubai (伍佰) and Chen Sheng (陳昇) proudly reclaimed the word, the print media also published several books (e.g., *Call me Taike*) and special magazine issues (e.g., *Eslite Reader*) that linked *taike* with local arts and culture. In this wave of *taike* discourse, *tai* is about local identity, and *taike* is uniquely Taiwanese.

Yet there were worries that the reclamation attempts did not change the stigma associated with the term or the group so indexed in any substantial way. Guan-Ru Chen (2006) pointed out that the term *taike* has no equivalent in local languages other than Mandarin. Even when the singers involved in the *Taike* Rock’n Roll concert tried to promote the term, they had to code-switch to the Mandarin pronunciation of *taike* within an otherwise Taiwanese speech. This instance of code-switching illustrates that *taike* remains to be an *other* constructed by the Mandarin-speaking population. The aforementioned joint press conference held in August 2005 by Taiwan North Society and Taiwan Association of University Professors also expressed a similar view. They argued that the literal meaning of *taike* (that is, ‘Taiwan(ese) as visitors from outside’) implies that Taiwan(ese) is secondary to China (or things associated with China), and that any use of the term carries this implication. They thus called for a total abandonment of the term.⁵

The sudden popularity of *taike* discourses and the ensuing controversy also attracted attention from academia. Lin (2008) categorized related academic works, most of which are Master’s theses, into five categories based on their main analytic angles:

1. *Taike* as a subjective group (Zhu 2003).
2. *Taike* as a construction by other (G. Chen 2006; Li 2006; Lin 2006; Wang 2007; Zheng 2003).
3. *Taike* as sub-culture (Chang 2006; Tsai 2004; Xie 2006)

⁵ See the following link for a news report on this event: <http://www.epochtimes.com/b5/5/8/19/n1023505.htm>

4. *Taike* as media reproduction (He 2006; Lai 2006; J. T. Liao 2006).
5. *Taike* as a manifestation of cultural hegemony (G. Chen 2006; Wang 2007).

Most of these works situated themselves in the fields of cultural studies and media studies and sought to interpret the sudden popularity of *taike* discourse. The current study, in contrast, investigates how *taike* serves as a site where language ideologies surface and interact with other cultural ideologies. In addition, rather than focusing on the *taike* phenomenon at its peak, this study aims to explore the current attitudes toward the term, after the fierce meaning struggle has subsided and the meaning contestation is no longer public and on the table, now that it has slipped into everyday descriptive/evaluative language use.

3. Theoretical framework

The meaning contestation in *taike* is reminiscent of the appropriation of derogatory labels such as *nigger* and *queer* in the United States and the English-speaking world. Though generally perceived as a highly offensive racist term, the N-word serves a number of non-racist communicative functions. For example, according to Wong's (2005) review, African Americans used it "to mean 'male' without any evaluative implications (Spears 1998:239), to refer to a person who acts inappropriately (Smitherman 1977:62), and to identify themselves as real, authentic, and unassimilated (Kennedy 2002)" (766). It has also been used subversively by Black teens in London to tease their white friends (Hewitt 1986). As Hewitt has pointed out, while such a practice acknowledges the presence of racism, the interactive ritual, at the same time, "acts out the negation of its effect" (238). The exact meaning of the word is not always stable but is constantly negotiated as the interaction unfolds.

Queer is another highly politicized term and a prime example that illustrates semantic indeterminacy and contestation. Originally a pejorative slang term for homosexual, it has been appropriated and resignified as a positive umbrella term by activists and theorists for anyone who challenges the heteronormative view of sexuality, including gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender and transsexual people, etc. (Brontsema 2004; Butler 1993; Jacobs 1998; McConnell-Ginet 2002). The resignification is made possible because the connection between a linguistic sign and what it signifies is subject to change according to the context in which the linguistic sign appears, thus opening the possibility of redefinition. Butler (1993; 1997) therefore urges the sexual minorities to claim the term so as to subvert and refute the homophobic deployment of it. The resignification has been successful to a certain degree; however, the contexts in which *queer* can be used positively are still generally

limited to ones within gay-affirmative groups and academic discussions (McConnell-Ginet 2002).

In contrast to *queer*, *gay* had a later emergence, but quickly established itself as a neutral form for use by outsiders in referring to self-identified homosexuals (Brontsema 2004; Jacobs 1998; McConnell-Ginet 2002). Although the term is seen as relatively non-judgmental, McConnell-Ginet (2002) has noted a relatively recent use of *gay* as an all-purpose derogatory descriptor which roughly means “uncool” or “gross.” It is quite likely that a phrase such as ‘that’s so gay’ arises from negative attitude toward gay sexuality, though its users may not be fully aware of its origin and the implicit contempt. The situation is not unlike the case with *taike* and *tai*, where *tai* is a descriptor derived from the label *taike*.

Also focusing on labels related to sexuality, Wong and Zhang (2000) and Wong (2005) investigated the semantic change of *tongzhi* in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Originally meaning “comrade” in Chinese, the term *tongzhi* was appropriated by Hong Kong and Taiwan gay-rights activists to refer to lesbians, gay men, and other sexual minorities. *Tongzhi* invokes the voice of Chinese revolutionaries and the values they espoused, such as freedom, respect, and equality. The term used to have some negative association with Chinese communists, but activists managed to ameliorate it and successfully reclaimed the term (Wong and Zhang 2000). However, any resignification might be further resignified. Wong (2005) reports on the reappropriation of *tongzhi* by a mainstream newspaper in Hong Kong in which *tongzhi* is used parodically to ridicule gay rights activists and to increase the entertainment value of its news stories.

In her paper discussing meaning contestation in *queer*, *gay*, and *lesbian*, McConnell-Ginet (2002) sketches a theoretical discussion on how word meanings emerge as part and parcel of social and political practices. She summarizes four ideas about language and word meaning as follows:

1. Natural languages are in important ways like formal linguistic systems or logics in which basic expressions—the word-like units—are not given fixed meanings but must be assigned interpretations when the system is used.
2. The cognitive structure underlying the concept of (content) word labels is less like a definition or a prototype than like a theory (or family of theories) in which that concept plays a key role.
3. Interpretations draw on preceding discourse understandings and on projections of future plans.
4. Linguistic communication involves bringing about some kind of change in the discourse-produced picture of how things are (or might be or should be).

(149)

McConnell-Ginet points out the fluid nature of word meaning, yet the fluidity is not without limit. Words such as *nigger*, *queer*, *gay*, *tongzhi*, and *taike* are always associated with families of theories or discursive practices that give rise to their meanings.

But *taike* is not just a word that illustrates semantic indeterminacy and contestation. The discursive practice associated with it also draws on sociolinguistic stereotypes related to Taiwanese or Taiwanese-accented Mandarin to construct the meaning of *tai* and *taike*. In this regard, discourse associated with *tai* and *taike* can be seen as a site where language ideologies surface and are negotiated. In the past two decades or so, there has been a growing literature concerning the mediating role of language ideologies between social forms and forms of talk (e.g., Blommaert 1999; Coupland and Bishop 2007; Irvine 2001; Kroskrity 2000, 2004; Schiefflin, Woolard and Kroskrity 1998; Woolard and Schiefflin 1994). One of the most well-known definitions of language ideologies is provided by Michael Silverstein (1979) who defined language ideologies as “sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use” (183). Departing from Silverstein’s emphasis on language structure, Irvine (1989) provided a more socially oriented definition that recognizes language ideologies as potentially constructed in the interest of particular groups. To Irvine, language ideologies are “the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests” (1989:255). In a review article on gender and language ideologies, Cameron (2003) further argued for a conceptualization of language ideologies as “sets of representations of language” rather than “beliefs” or “attitudes” relating to language, because the latter terms may imply ideologies as mental constructs and individual possessions. Instead, language ideologies should be seen as social constructs and “ways of understanding the world that emerge from interaction with particular (public) representations of it” (2003:448). Seen from the more socially oriented perspective, the circulating discourse of *tai* and *taike* (at least before the reclamation attempts) is an evaluative device that reproduces the ideologies of the dominant social group.

Su (2008), in a study also set in Taiwan, investigates how the discourse about *qizhi*, a term often used to evaluate a woman’s degree of refinement and roughly glossed as “a refined disposition”, serves as the meeting ground of gender ideologies and language ideologies. Su’s (2008) investigation of *qizhi* and the current study share a similar analytic stance: both are interested in how language ideologies are embedded in talk centering on cultural concepts familiar to the local community, and how such talks become an important site where social meanings related to common linguistic varieties are constantly reproduced, contested, and shaped.

4. Methodology

Between late 2008 and early 2010, 344 valid questionnaires were collected in northern Taiwan (specifically from Taipei, Taoyuan, and Xinzhu).⁶ The subjects were recruited through my own and my research assistants' social networks. Although the sample is not a random one, we tried to recruit subjects with backgrounds as diverse as possible. We limited the site of data collection to the northern part of Taiwan because there is a prominent set of discourses about differences between the north and the south on a number of levels circulating in Taiwan (see Su 2005 and Liao 2010 for a detailed discussion). Investigating whether the description of such difference is empirically accurate is beyond the scope of this study. Thus we decided to focus only on the northern part of Taiwan.

Each questionnaire was composed of three parts. The first part presented open-ended questions that asked participants to list up to three public figures that best fit the image of *taike*, as well as representative public figures that could be described with the near-antonym *qizhi* 'a refined disposition' and the near-synonym *bentu* 'local'. They were then asked to give a short explanation of why the figures provided were perceived as such. This set of questions sought to explore what are considered stereotypical *taike*, *qizhi*, and *bentu* characteristics. The main locus of analysis was the data about *taike*, and the responses about *qizhi* and *bentu* served as comparisons that might provide additional information about the nuances of meaning differences. The focus of analysis was mostly on the explanations subjects provided rather than the public figures identified.

The second part asked participants to rate on a five-point scale whether they would take it as a strong compliment (1), a mild compliment (2), a neutral comment (3), a mild criticism (4), or a strong criticism (5) if someone were to describe them with *tai*, *qizhi*, or *bentu*. This set of questions sought to explore whether the adjective *tai* is taken positively or negatively, in comparison to *qizhi* and *bentu*, by the participants. Spaces were also offered for the participants to explain their choices.⁷

The third part asked the participants to provide personal information including their age, gender, education level, and ethnicity.

⁶ All of the subjects currently reside in Taipei, Taoyuan, or Xinzhu, but some of them come from other parts of Taiwan.

⁷ It is possible that the meaning of the descriptor *tai* does not evolve solely from *taike*. As one anonymous reviewer pointed out, common terms such as *taishang* (Taiwanese businesspeople), *taizi* (Taiwanese investment), *taiqiao* (overseas Taiwanese) all contain the morpheme *tai* 'of Taiwan' and may contribute to the meaning of *tai* as a descriptor. While I cannot rule out this possibility, I believe that *tai* as a descriptor is most strongly associated with *taike*, as *tai* as a descriptor emerges only recently after the popularization of *taike*. In the current study, the association is also made explicit in the questionnaire, in which the first part deals with stereotypes of *taike* and the second part elicits subjects' evaluation of *tai*-ness, thus ruling out other potential interpretations of *tai*.

The method of this study was partially informed by the indirect approach of language attitude studies. A direct elicitation of subjects' evaluations of *tai*-ness might have induced "politically correct" responses, whatever those might be in the subjects' mind, since *taike* is quite a politicized term. Thus I chose to adopt a more indirect approach.

The questionnaire results were then analyzed quantitatively using SPSS. The first set of questions involved two parts: public figures representative of *taike*, *qizhi*, and *bentu* and the explanations of why they were perceived as such. In the first part, the most mentioned public figures were identified by frequency count. The explanations were then categorized into language-related ones and others, and the former were further classified. The second set of questions involved subjects' evaluation of the three terms when the terms were used to describe themselves. ANOVA tests were carried out to explore the effect of gender, age, education, and ethnicity on the subjects' evaluation of *tai*, *qizhi*, and *bentu* at the α level of .05. Because the numbers of subjects across categories are not balanced, Levene's test was also conducted to examine whether ANOVA's homogeneity-of-variance assumption still holds in each case. In the cases where the homogeneity-of-variance assumption is violated, the corrected version of the *F*-ratio, the Brown-Forsythe *F*, is reported.

5. Data analysis

5.1 The role language plays in *taike* stereotypes

As mentioned earlier, the first part of the questionnaires asked participants to list up to three public figures that best fit the images of *taike*, *qizhi*, and *bentu* and to explain their choices. In this section, I present responses to this set of questions, but only focus on the two near-synonyms, *taike* and *bentu*. The public figures who got the highest votes on *taike* are Wubai (伍佰, a male rock'n roll singer who played a significant role in the Taike Rock'n Roll Concert, 186 votes) and The Sparkling Three Sisters (閃亮三姊妹, a female singing group, 45 votes). The ones who got the highest votes on *bentu* are Jacky Wu (吳宗憲, a male talk show host, singer, and actor, 66 votes) and Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁, the former president, 55 votes).

The primary focus of this set of questions was on the explanatory part. I categorized the explanations into those that explicitly invoked linguistic practice/labels and the general or non-linguistic ones. For example, "(he/she) speaks Taiwanese-accented Mandarin", "grass-root speaking style", "the way he/she speaks", etc. were counted as language-related ones. Explanations such as "strong local identity", "he dresses casually", and "the overall behavior" were counted as

non-linguistic ones, although in the last case language behavior might play a role in the overall behavior. Results show that 212 out of 557 (38.1%) responses to the *taike* question are specifically related to language, while only 99 out of 459 (21.6%) responses to the *bentu* question are language-related. A further scrutiny of the language-related responses shows that the extent to which the two terms are associated with different linguistic labels also differs. Table 1 summarizes the results. The first three categories are *Taiyu/Minnanyu* ‘Taiwanese’, *Taiwan guoyu* ‘Taiwanese-accented Mandarin’, and *kouyin, qiang(diao)* ‘accent’. Only responses that explicitly mentioned these terms were counted. Ambiguous accounts such as “his/her language is not standard” and “the way he/she speaks” were categorized into “general account”.

Table 1. Categorization of language-related explanations of *taike* and *bentu*

	Taike	Bentu
<i>Taiyu</i> ‘Taiwanese’	32 (15.1%)	44 (44.4%)
<i>Taiwan Guoyu</i> ‘Taiwanese-accented Mandarin’	44 (20.8%)	21 (21.2%)
<i>Kouyin, qiang(diao)</i> ‘accent’	43 (20.3%)	9 (9.1%)
Code-mixing	6 (2.8%)	2 (2.0%)
General account	87 (41.0%)	23 (23.2%)
Total	212 (100%)	99 (100%)

Although “Taiwanese-accented Mandarin” and “accent” were treated as two categories in Table 1, it is quite likely that the “accent” pointed out by the subjects refers to the Taiwanese accent in Mandarin. If we merge the two categories, the “Taiwanese-accented Mandarin/accent” category alone would account for over 40 percent of the language-related accounts in the case of *taike*, making this category the most weighted one. In contrast, “Taiwanese” was the most mentioned linguistic label in the case of *bentu*, which largely outweighs the union of “Taiwanese-accented Mandarin/accent.” Deeper scrutiny of the language-related responses further indicates that the two terms indeed have different connotations.

5.2 Evaluation of *tai*, *qizhi*, and *bentu*

The second part of the questionnaire explores participants’ evaluation of the three descriptors. Overall, the average of the ratings given to *tai*, *qizhi*, and *bentu* are 3.94,

1.58, 3.20, respectively. The average ratings suggest that *tai* is perceived of most negatively among the three and *qizhi* most positively while *bentu* falls between and is close to neutral. Below I discuss participants' evaluation across different social groups.

5.2.1 Gender

The sample contained 128 males and 216 females. The average scores of the ratings by the female and male groups are provided in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Average scores given to *tai*, *qizhi*, and *bentu* by gender (1=strong compliment, 5=strong criticism)

	Tai	Qizhi	Bentu
Male	3.74	1.74	3.11
Female	4.06	1.48	3.25

The two groups' average scores suggest that *tai* and *bentu* are perceived more negatively and *qizhi* is perceived more positively by females than by males. Figure 1 presents a graphic comparison of the two groups' average ratings. Note that the female group tends to give more extreme ratings than their male counterparts.

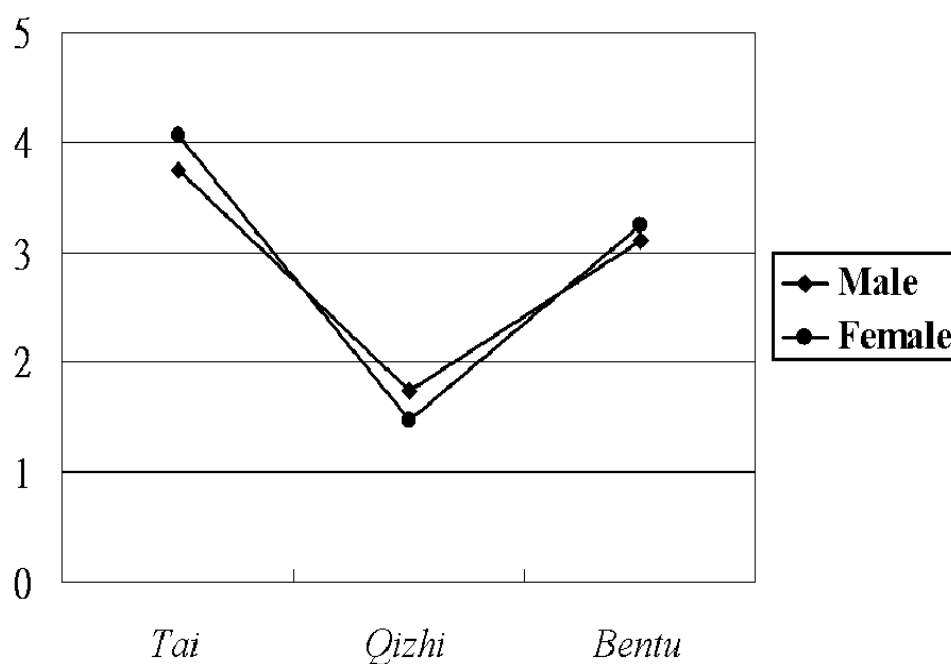


Figure 1. Average ratings given to *tai*, *qizhi*, and *bentu* by gender

Three respective one-way ANOVA tests were carried out to investigate the effect of gender on the three descriptors. The results indicate that gender is a significant factor that influences the ratings of *tai* ($F(1, 234.38)=12.41, p=.001$) and *qizhi* ($F(1, 204.40)=9.52, p=.002$), but it does not have a significant impact on the evaluation of *bentu* ($F(1, 342)=3.12, p=.08$).⁸

5.2.2 Age

Subjects were divided into four age groups: 15-22, 23-30, 31-45, and those above 45. The first two groups, those aged 15-22 and 23-30, were members of the younger generations who witnessed the emergence of *taike* as a youth slang term when they were in their teens or early twenties. They were further divided because of lifestyle differences: many members of the former group in Taiwan nowadays are students and most members of the latter group are working (see Eckert (1998) for a discussion of life stage as a categorization principle). The second group, 31-45 year olds, was in their late twenties or in their thirties when *taike* stereotype first emerged. The third group, those 46 and older, was the group that would have been likely unfamiliar with the term until several years later when it had become somewhat politicized. The number of subjects in each group from youngest to oldest was 194, 74, 38, and 38, respectively. Their average ratings given to the three descriptors are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Average ratings given to *tai*, *qizhi*, and *bentu* by age (1=strong compliment, 5=strong criticism)

Age	Tai	Qizhi	Bentu
15-22	4.05	1.54	3.25
23-30	3.92	1.54	3.08
31-45	3.76	1.66	3.13
46 and older	3.58	1.75	3.21

The average ratings suggest that *tai* is perceived more negatively by the younger groups while *qizhi* patterns in the opposite way. *Bentu* does not seem to have a clearly recognizable connection with age groups. Figure 2 presents the relationship between the four age groups' average ratings.

⁸ Originally I planned to analyze the three individual One-way ANOVA in one set of analysis as one-way MANOVA to avoid the possible inflation of Type 1 error. However, because in some of the data set the homogeneity-of-variance assumption does not hold, I decided to do individual ANOVA analyses so that I can monitor whether and where the assumption is violated and correct the *F*-ratio (using Brown-Forsythe *F*) accordingly.

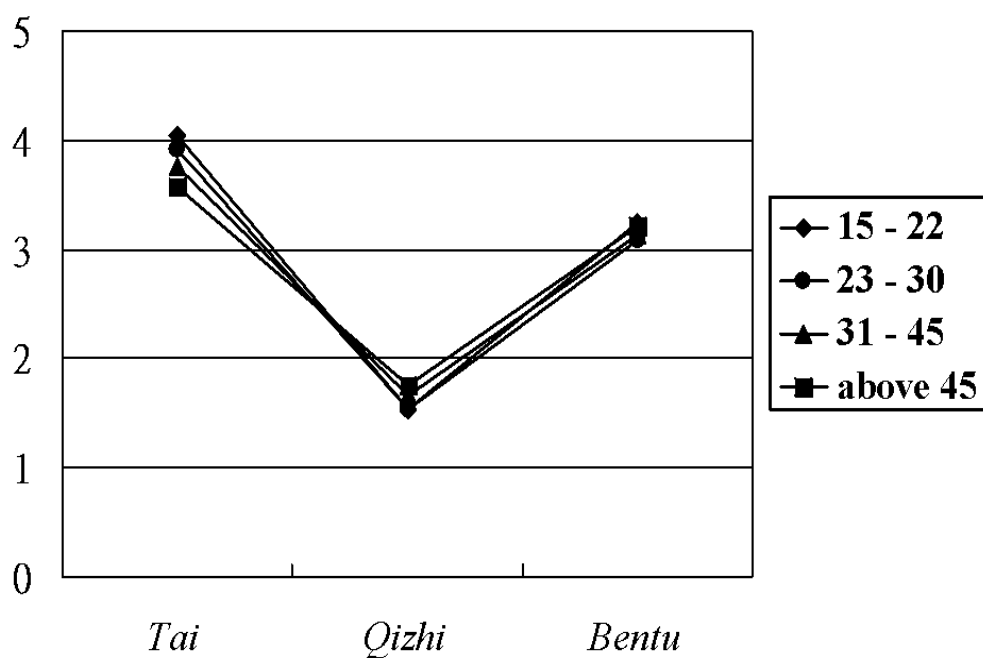


Figure 2. Average ratings given to *tai*, *qizhi*, and *bentu* by age

The results of three respective one-way ANOVA tests indicate that age only has a significant effect on the perception of *tai* ($F(3, 340)=4.81, p=.003$), but not on the perception of *qizhi* ($F(3, 340)=1.169, p=.321$) or *bentu* ($F(3, 216.83)=1.39, p=.247$).

A *post hoc* analysis (Bonferroni) of the effect of age on *tai* shows that there are significant differences between the youngest group and the oldest group ($p=.004$).

5.2.3 Education

I divided the subjects into two groups according to their highest education: below college level and college level and above. Eleven subjects did not identify their level of education and thus were excluded from the analysis. The number of subjects in each group was 157 and 176, respectively. The average ratings given to the three descriptors are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Average ratings given to *tai*, *qizhi*, and *bentu* by education (1=strong compliment, 5=strong criticism)

Education	Tai	Qizhi	Bentu
Below college	3.82	1.71	3.22
College and above	4.01	1.47	3.14

The average scores suggest that those who are better-educated perceive *tai* more negatively and *qizhi* more positively. They also rate *bentu* more positively, but the difference seems small. Figure 3 presents the average scores graphically.

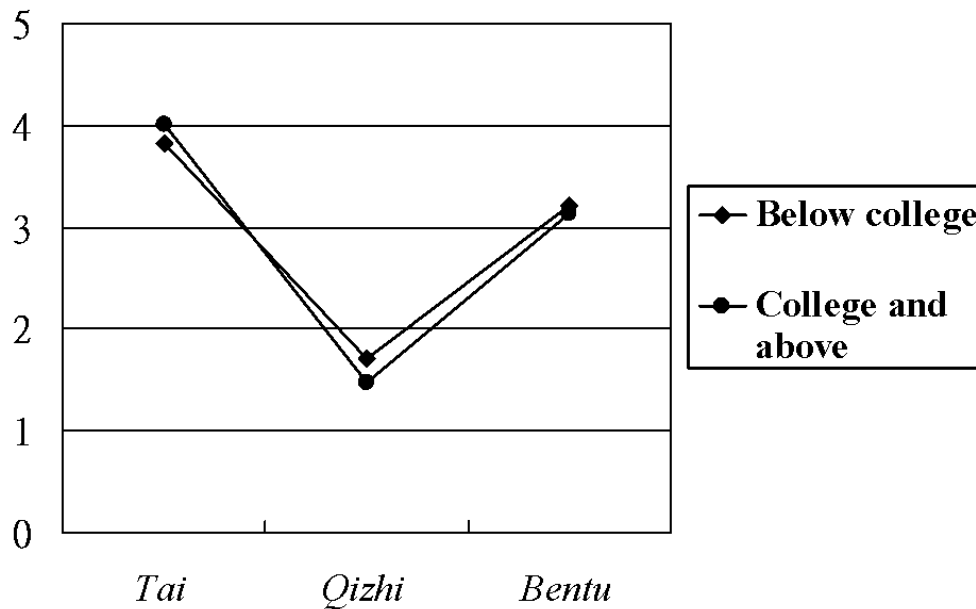


Figure 3. Average ratings given to *tai*, *qizhi*, and *bentu* by education

The results of ANOVA tests indicate that education shows a significant effect on the perception of *tai* ($F(1, 307.93)=4.85, p=.028$) and *qizhi* ($F(1, 331)=10.01, p=.002$), but not in the case of *bentu* ($F(1, 331)=.803, p=.371$).

5.2.4 Ethnicity

The subjects were divided into two groups based on whether they belonged to the Southern Min group or not. The division is so made because the *taike* stereotype draws on a number of characteristics typically associated with the Southern Min group, most noticeably the use of Taiwanese and Taiwanese-accented Mandarin. I was interested in whether the Southern Min would evaluate *tai* differently from the others. The numbers of subjects in the Southern Min group and the non-Southern Min group were 201 and 143, respectively. The average ratings given to the three descriptors are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Average ratings given to *tai*, *qizhi*, and *bentu* by ethnicity (1=strong compliment, 5=strong criticism)

Ethnicity	Tai	Qizhi	Bentu
Southern Min	3.90	1.60	3.22
Others	3.99	1.55	3.16

The ANOVA results indicate that ethnicity does not have a significant effect on the perception of the three descriptors (*tai*: $F(1, 342)=1.15$, $p=.284$; *qizhi*: $F(1, 342)=.32$, $p=.571$; *bentu*: $F(1, 342)=.57$, $p=.449$).

5.2.5 Summary of statistical results

The statistical results discussed above are summarized as follows and in Table 6.

1. The evaluation of *tai* and *qizhi* shows differences in social distribution, but *bentu* has no such effect.
2. *Tai* and *qizhi* pattern quite similarly in terms of the factors of gender and education, but in the opposite direction. That is, female and the higher educated tend to evaluate *tai* more negatively and *qizhi* more positively. Male and the lower educated tend to evaluate *tai* less negatively and *qizhi* less positively.
3. Age only has significant effect on the evaluation of *tai*.
4. Ethnicity does not have any significant effect on the evaluation of the three descriptors.

Table 6. Summary of statistical results (refers to $p<.01$, * refers to $p<.05$, n.s. refers to 'not significant')**

	Tai	Qizhi	Bentu
Gender	**	**	n.s.
Education	*	**	n.s.
Age	**	n.s.	n.s.
Ethnicity	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.

6. Discussion

6.1 General discussion

Results of the analysis of responses to the two sets of questions in the questionnaires respond to the first two research questions. An analysis of the results of first set of questions suggests that language plays a highly noticeable role in the

construction of *taike* and *tai*-ness. About 40 percent of the subjects mentioned practices related to language when responding to the defining characteristics of *taike*, among which (Taiwanese-) accented Mandarin was especially frequently noted. The results show a contrast between *taike* and the near-synonym *bentü*, where language practice was mentioned less frequently in general, and when indeed it was mentioned, Taiwanese was much more frequently articulated than (Taiwanese-) accented Mandarin.

An especially interesting point to note is the iconic relationship between Taiwanese-accented Mandarin and other frequently noted non-linguistic characteristics. Taiwanese-accented Mandarin as a stigmatized label is often stereotypically considered by laypeople as a result of a Taiwanese speaker's failed attempt at acquiring the "standard" accent. Non-linguistic characteristics associated with *taike* also show a parallel. One frequently mentioned characteristic, for example, is wearing fake designer brands or mixing inconsistent fashion elements unwisely in an outfit. What is implied in such a description is also failure to acquire the mainstream fashion sense (in terms of both a lack of competence and material resources).

Such an iconic relationship suggests that attitudes toward language practice do not exist in isolation. They are part and parcel of social evaluation of more general sorts. In addition, language attitudes do not always manifest themselves in explicit talk about language, but may be embedded in discourses that, at first sight, do not seem readily relevant to language. Through the circulation of *taike* discourses, language ideologies are constantly reproduced and reshaped, along with the reproduction and reshaping of ideologies of other sorts (such as fashion and recreational preferences). And the reproductions of ideologies of these different fields are not independent processes that are simply present in the same set of discourses. Rather, ideologies of the different sorts are interconnected and are constantly shaping each other. In Bourdieu's (1984) terms, the fundamental connection of the practices in different fields lies in similar conditions of existence associated with particular social groups, in this case, *taike* and its contrastive groups.

The second set of questions in the questionnaires addresses the current attitudes toward *tai* and two other related terms across different social groups. The statistical results indicate that attitudes toward the terms (and their associated characteristics) are not unified; there are contesting attitudes across different social groups. But overall, *tai* is still taken as a somewhat derogatory term, with an average rating of 3.94, despite the reclamation efforts.

Among the three terms, *bentü* is the most neutral one, with an average rating of 3.20. It is also the only term that does not show any attitudinal differentiation across

gender, age, education level, or ethnicity. *Tai* and *qizhi*, in contrast, do show different evaluative stances across social groups. They pattern similarly but in the opposite direction with regard to gender and education. As mentioned above, *tai* is perceived more negatively and *qizhi* more positively by females and the better-educated than by males and the less well-educated. The parallel pattern between gender and education corresponds to results from many sociolinguistic works which report that females tend to aim at the overt prestige associated with standard languages while men (especially working class men) tend not to do so (e.g., Trudgill's (1972) well-known study in Norwich). I will discuss the gender issue further later.

Though *qizhi* and *tai* pattern similarly with regard to gender and education, they differ in their relationships with the "age" factor. Statistical results show that age has no significant effect on the perception of *qizhi*, yet plays a significant role in the evaluation of *tai*. In other words, there is no attitudinal shift about *qizhi* across generations, but the reverse is true about *tai*. In contrast to *tai*, *qizhi* is a term that has long existed in the community, but the long term existence alone does not guarantee unified social evaluation across generations. One can only infer that the evaluation of practices or characteristics associated with *qizhi* remains stable and positive across the community at large.

Tai, however, tells another story. Members of the younger generation tend to evaluate it more negatively. In fact, the younger they are, the more negative the attitudes are. There are two possible interpretations. First, since *tai* emerges from youth slang, it is likely that the older generations are less familiar with the negative connotation of *tai*-ness, even though they may have heard of the term and believe that they know what it means. Second, the older generations do know the meaning of *tai* and its related practices, but do not see them as being as undesirable as the younger generations do.

In either case, the age pattern in the statistics ultimately points to the younger generation's increasingly negative attitude toward *tai*-ness and the associated practices, among which are the linguistic ones. The second interpretation above directly leads to this conclusion, and the first one, though seemingly less related to such a claim at first sight, also points in the same direction. The emergence of a label often indicates a growing need of social differentiation, and the very fact that the older generations, though familiar with the practices related to *taike*, did not need such a label indicates a shift in attitude and the younger generations' increasing need of distinction-making.

Unlike the other three independent variables, ethnicity has no significant effect on the perception of any of the three terms. I was somewhat surprised by this result since the *taike* discourses draw on quite a few characteristics associated with the Southern Mins. But it turns out that the Southern Mins, as a group, do not show attitudinal

difference toward *taike* from other groups.

6.2 *Tai* and *bentu*: The meanings of localness

Tai and *bentu*, though both referring to localness, clearly have different meanings. As discussed above, results of the first set of questions show that the two terms are associated with a range of linguistic practices to different extents. The differences are even more pronounced in the results of the second set of questions, as summarized in Table 6. The sharp contrast is also reminiscent of my analysis of the earlier interview data where a distinction between *taike* and authentic Taiwanese elders had been made.

The contrast between *bentu* and *tai*, on the one hand, and local Taiwanese (who are *bentu* but not *tai*) and *taike*, on the other hand, points to an underlying ideology about localness—there are different senses of localness, and the more desirable one is associated with authenticity, pureness, and credibility. *Bentu* is a term which commonly appears in discourses related to Taiwanization, indigenization, and Taiwanese Nationalism. The Taiwanese language is also strongly associated with the discourses related to *bentu* or Taiwanese Nationalism (Chiung 2007). It is closely tied with the identity label *taiwanren*, literally ‘Taiwanese’ and is often promoted as a structurally sophisticated language that preserves archaic forms. Coupland (2003) suggests five attributes commonly attached to the notion of authenticity: ontology, historicity, systemic coherence, consensus, and value. The Taiwanese language and the local Taiwanese in the discourses of Taiwanese nationalism involve all five of them.

In contrast, *tai* is often used to refer to Taiwanese young adults who are local but try to be “above themselves.” According to Wang (2007) and my questionnaire results, mixing incompatible stylistic elements unwisely—in terms of both fashion sense and linguistic practices—appears to be an important defining characteristic of *taike* and *tai*-ness. Thus, a *taike* is often stereotypically portrayed as someone who wears fake designer products, speaks Taiwanese-accented Mandarin, and sometimes code-switches to English terms (albeit with a Taiwanese accent). At the center of this stereotype is a mockery of the inauthenticity, impurity, and most salient of all, the lack of systemic coherence (Coupland 2003) inherent in *tai* attributes. *Taike* and *tai*-ness fall short at both ends; they are neither authentically local nor credibly cosmopolitan.

6.3 *Tai* and *qizhi*: Cultural capitals unevenly distributed

Although *tai* and *qizhi* are often treated as oppositional in their meanings (as in questionnaire comments such as “I’d be unhappy if someone describes me as *tai*,

because it means that I do not have *qizhi*”), the statistical results concerning the perceptions toward the two terms (as summarized in Table 6) show that they pattern similarly in all respects except age. The parallel but opposing evaluations of *tai* and *qizhi* indicate that the two can indeed be treated as antonyms, particularly in terms of their social connotations.

However, the denotation of *qizhi*, roughly glossable as “a (refined) disposition,” does not readily contrast with “localness.” Yet a further exploration of the questionnaire results indicates that *qizhi* is, to a certain extent, associated with cosmopolitanism. As mentioned above, in the questionnaire, the subjects are asked to name public figures whom they perceive to be good representatives of the three terms in question. Strikingly, the first eight public figures who got the highest votes are all women with an intelligent and graceful public image who have been either Western-educated or educated under a strong Western influence.⁹

I do not wish to claim that *qizhi* is just about cosmopolitanism or that these women are seen as having *qizhi* simply because of their western-influenced educational background. Instead, *qizhi* encompasses something much wider. Su (2008) argues that *qizhi* can be seen as “a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1991) unevenly distributed across different groups and a site that reproduces and reinforces social distinction” (352). As cosmopolitanism indexes cultural resourcefulness, it is no wonder that cosmopolitanism can function as a component of *qizhi*.

The parallel but opposing evaluations toward *tai* and *qizhi* can, thus, be understood in light of the contrast between (inauthentic) localness and cosmopolitanism, on the one hand, and a lack of cultural capital and having cultural resourcefulness, on the other hand. If *qizhi* is a form of cultural capital, it can be further inferred that the groups with access to such cultural capital would tend to evaluate *qizhi* and associated practices/attributes more positively as a means to reproduce or reinforce social boundaries. The statistical results which show that the better-educated rate *qizhi* significantly higher verify the claim. In a similar fashion, *tai* also involves reproduction of social distinction, but in the opposite direction. Labeling someone as *tai* is, thus, an act of boundary-making and self-distancing from the group with limited access to cultural resources.

The parallel pattern between gender and education in the evaluations of *tai* and *qizhi* is also worth further exploring. As mentioned above, the pattern corresponds to results from many sociolinguistic works which associate females with mainstream

⁹ They are Chih-ling Lin (林志玲, 144 votes), Lun-mei Kuei (桂綸鎂, 63 votes), Petty Hou (侯佩岑, 42 votes), Sonia Sui (隋棠, 18 votes), Yun-yun Sun (孫芸芸, 16 votes), Yi-shan Tsai (蔡依珊, 13 votes), Chun-hua Shen (沈春華, 13 votes), and Jun-ning Chang (張鈞甯, 13 votes). Except for Kuei (who has a French degree from Tamkang University) and Chang (who was born in Germany and spent part of her childhood there), all the others have degrees from Western countries. The eight women are also the only ones that receive more than 10 votes.

linguistic norms. Su (2008) argues that among the common linguistic varieties in Taiwan, Taiwanese-accented Mandarin is seen as especially incompatible with the ideal femininity indexed by *qizhi*. The strong association of *tai*-ness with Taiwanese-accented Mandarin, as manifested in the questionnaire data, may be a major cause of *tai*'s lower rating among the female subjects.

6.4 Cosmopolitanism, localism, and authenticity

The above exploration of the results related to *tai*, *qizhi*, and *bentu* clearly illustrates two co-existing (and possibly competing) strands of ideologies in Taiwan: cosmopolitanism and internationalization as cultural resourcefulness, and localism and indigenization as a manifestation of the authentic Taiwanese identity. Both are promoted and evaluated positively in many public discourses, yet at times ambivalence toward the two can be detected. The ambivalence surfaces in the mockery of *taike*: they are in between and do not measure up to either standard. At the center of the discourse is an ideology of authenticity—not necessarily in the essentialist sense that anchors identity in a specific place, but in the post-modern celebration of cosmopolitanism. Even when cultural diversity and hybridity are valued, certain behaviors/practices are still deemed as not credible enough.

The two strands of ideologies and the ambivalence toward the global and the local in the Taiwanese society manifest themselves in a number of arenas. For example, Mao (2008) investigates curriculum reforms and identity politics in Taiwan and explores the ambivalence toward indigenization and globalization in the indigenization curriculum in the 1990's (as a countering act to the earlier China-centered curriculum) and the new curriculum in the 2000's in the face of economic regression and an urge for global competitiveness. Su-Chiao Chen (2006) examines the language-in-education policies since 1990's that simultaneously promote indigenization (local-language-in-education policy) and internationalization (English education policy) and concludes that the latter is more thoroughly planned and more vigorously implemented. Even the heated debate about Romanization in the 2000's touches upon the global-local ambivalence, as the issue was whether to adopt Hanyu Pinyin system, which is created and used in China and has global currency, or to create a new system that better suits local needs (including a need for local identity) (Li 2001, Her 2005). Seen from this light, the discourses of *tai* is another manifestation of the global-local ambivalence collectively experienced in Taiwan. In light of McConnell-Ginet's (2002) theorization of word meaning, the semantic contestation of *tai* is ultimately related to the competing discourses (such as cosmopolitanism, globalization, localism, indigenization, and authenticity) circulating

in contemporary Taiwan.

6.5 *Taike* and language ideologies

From a sociolinguistic perspective, what is particularly striking in the data is how the social meanings of language and linguistic practices are woven into the related discourses. In *taike* discourses, the value judgments about the associated linguistic practices are not expressed directly. Instead, the evaluation is carried out through comments (either positive or negative) about *tai*-ness and *taike*, in which linguistic practices as well as non-linguistic ones are simultaneously invoked. The indirectness, however, does not diminish the power of such evaluative processes. In fact, I sometimes wonder if such processes are more prevalent and influential than explicit direct ones since the indirect evaluations are embedded in familiar cultural concepts and are undertaken every time the cultural concepts in question are invoked. As Su (2008) argues, talk on *qizhi* is an important site where language ideologies, along with ideologies concerning other factors (e.g., gender and class), are constantly verbalized, challenged, and reinforced. I suggest that the *taike* discourses also involve a similar process.

7. Conclusion

This study attempts to provide an initial sketch of the current attitudes toward *taike* and *tai*-ness several years after the public struggles regarding their meaning erupted. Such an investigation not only provides information about the status quo but also reveals how discourses about *taike* and *tai* could serve as a site where language ideologies, along with ideologies concerning cosmopolitanism, globalism, localism, and authenticity, are shaped, contested, and reproduced. Specifically, I argue that, first, the semantic contestation of *tai* is ultimately related to the competing discourses of indigenization and globalization. Second, the study also illustrates the symbolic nature of language, as linguistic practices—such as a Taiwanese accent in Mandarin—come to play a symbolic role in the indexing of *tai*-ness.

As an initial sketch of the current attitude toward *tai*-ness, the study is limited in a number of ways. First, the sample is confined to my research team's social networks. Although there were six of us who tried to find subjects with backgrounds as diverse as possible within our personal networks, the sample was not a random one, and the numbers of subjects across categories are often unbalanced. A second limitation, and related to the first one, is that the site of the questionnaire collection was limited to northern Taiwan and, as such, can only represent the northern view on *taike* and

tai-ness. Third, the main goal of the study was to provide a quantitative overview of the current attitudes toward *taike* and *tai*. It does not investigate qualitatively how *tai* is used in current everyday language. The five-point scale in the questionnaires, in a way, reduces the complexity of attitudes into a definite number and does not account for the context in which an evaluation occurred. Future study may dig into the issue further either by quantitatively expanding the scope or by qualitatively investigating the process through which the meaning of *tai*-ness is negotiated and constituted.

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從「台」一詞的語意爭論看語言態度的社會分佈

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本研究以「台客」及其衍生之「台」一形容詞為出發，探究「台」與語言態度之間的關連，及不同社會群體對「台」一詞的觀感。「台客」一詞在 2000 年代初期開始逐漸流行，初期多用以指稱穿著打扮追求流行卻不夠時尚的本地青年男女，其後歷經「台客正名」及「台客文藝復興」運動，試圖翻轉原有的負面意涵，使得「台」一詞之意義愈趨多元。此研究以三百四十四份問卷為本，探究「台」之意義爭論數年以後，現階段之大眾對其觀感為何，並探索「台」與語言態度之間的關係。統計結果指出，對「台」一詞之觀感仍然稍偏負面，女性，學歷較高者，及年輕族群，較男性，學歷較低者，及年長族群更容易給予「台」一詞負面評價。質化分析的部分指出語言行為為「台」一詞之定義裡十分重要的一部份，對「台」一詞之態度並與台灣近年之「本土化」及「全球化」兩種意識型態的角力十分相關。

關鍵詞：台客、語言態度、語意爭論、本土化、全球化