

# **Perception of the Minnan language by its native speakers and representation of the Minnan language in the press in Hainan and Taiwan in the context of Chinese and Taiwanese language policy**

## **Abstract**

Hainan (an island and a province in the People's Republic of China – PRC) and Taiwan (an island, which together with many smaller ones, forms the Republic of China) are two places characterized by exceptionally high linguistic diversity. They are inhabited mostly by native speakers of languages belonging to the macro-Chinese language, but non-Chinese languages play an important role as well. The aim of the thesis is to explore the attitudes of native Minnan speakers towards their language and the representation of Minnan in the press in Hainan and Taiwan in the context of Chinese and Taiwanese language policy. The thesis addresses perceptions of the Minnan language from the subjective perspective – field research in the form of a survey, and from a broader perspective – discourse analysis of the press.

The research presented in the thesis shows that the situation of the Minnan language is varied. Hainanhua and Taiyu are spoken in two, in many respects different, countries that also differ significantly in their language policies. One might assume that native speakers' perceptions of the Minnan language and the image of the language in the press would therefore be very different as well. However, while there are significant differences, similarities are hard to ignore. There are several reasons for this situation.

First, the current language policies of China and Taiwan differ significantly. In China only putonghua can be used in education, media, at work and other formal situations. There is no place for Hainanhua. Taiwan has undergone democratization for over thirty years and Taiyu is allowed all contexts but in reality it occupies a limited place alongside the dominant language i.e. Guoyu. Secondly, the historical language policies are similar from a general perspective. Both countries basically banned the use of languages other than the dominant language (China in 1949, Taiwan in 1946).

Thirdly, the perception of the Minnan language also varies. Native speakers of Taiyu believe that their language might be used, to a limited extent, in a variety of situations. Native speakers of Hainanhua disagree with this view. Both groups see their language as a natural way of communicating with older relatives. Native Minnan speakers in Taiwan there are mostly positive about the possibility of using their language in more contexts and some believe that children should be bilingual. This phenomenon cannot be observed in Hainan.

There are greater discrepancies in press discourse than in native speakers' perceptions of Minnan. The image of Hainanhua presented in *Hainan Daily* is not negative, but at the same time very limited. Speaking Hainanhua is neither condemned nor praised, but the articles suggest that it is the language of uneducated farmers. The role of Hainanhua in education amounts to a search for sensationalism. The language is not defined as a value in its own right, but as an essential part of identity and history. The place of Hainanhua has been strictly defined and in selected contexts it is viewed positively, while in others it does not even exist within theoretical considerations. In the case of Taiwan, the image of Taiyu presented in *Liberty Times*

is very positive. Journalists praise the use of the Taiwanese language, which might be used in a variety of contexts and is also a part of identity. Still, Taiyu always occupies only a specific space next to the dominant language, namely Guoyu. Overstepping these boundaries leads to a heated debate on its role. It seems that while the role of Hainanhua is fixed, the role of Taiyu can be discussed.

To sum up, Minnan is spoken only in specific contexts and its future lies in the hands of the native speakers. Hopefully they will continue to speak and cherish their mother tongue regardless of hostile or inept language policies, globalization, and other difficulties.