

## The Back Story and Preview of a New Edited Collection: *Language Policies in the New Age of AI*

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While the Taiwanese government may have proposed the “Bilingual Nation” (now “Bilingual 2030”) policy with the best intentions in 2017, it sparked fierce debate among scholars, teachers, and parents for its potential monumental impact on society. To raise critical issues regarding the repercussions of the policy on foreign language education and for that matter language policy in general, the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences (IHS) held the symposium, “A Future of Mediocrity and Impoverishment: Reflecting on the ‘Bilingual Nation’ Policy Initiative” in March of 2022. Then, just eight months later, ChatGPT, the large language model (LLM) application from OpenAI, was released. This suddenly presented yet another huge shock to language education in Taiwan and, in turn, on the bilingual policy. As the dean of IHS, Professor Sebastian Hsien-Hao Liao<sup>1</sup> foresaw this transformative potential of the artificial intelligence (AI) technology and recognized the need to spark further discussions on Taiwan’s language policy. Therefore, with a focus on the future of foreign language education in the age of AI, two symposia were held: “The Future is Here: Reconfiguring Foreign Language Policy” on December 1, 2023 and “The Crises and Opportunities of the Foreign Language Department” on March 15, 2024.

As professor Liao was aiming at policy recommendations when planning for these two events, he had in mind an edited volume as the end result of them, which is the book *Language Policies in the New Age of AI* [AI 新時代的語言政策] to be published in January 2025. It includes eleven essays by ten researchers from foreign language departments, English departments,

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and linguistics-related fields of several prominent universities in Taiwan. As the editor of the book, Liao points out that it serves as a continuation of IHS's 2022 publication, *The Fantasy of a Bilingual Nation* (雙語國家狂想), which he also edited. This new book is a much-needed addition, as it considers the emergence of AI—an important factor that had been touched upon only briefly at the time of the previous publication.

*Language Policies in the New Age of AI* consists of two parts: “Forward-Looking Language Policy (前瞻性的外語政策)”—focusing on how to establish a language policy that can withstand the trials in the age of AI—and “The Magnificent Transformation of the Foreign Language Department (外文系的華麗轉型)”—envisioning the possible future of foreign language departments. It is set to be published in January 2024, with the goal of reflecting on the issues of rebuilding humanities values and cultivating societal creativity as we enter the age of AI.

Liao opens the book with a chapter titled “Toward a Multilingual and AI-Friendly Taiwan: A Forward-Looking Foreign Language Policy (多語臺灣·AI友善：前瞻性的外語政策).” He argues that foreign language policy and for that matter language policy in general should be based on the visions of the future rather than concerns of the present. With AI rapidly gaining momentum, policy must also take into consideration the drastic changes created by its recent developments which include among other things the inevitable reduction of the general need for foreign language learning and the pivot toward native languages. For AI accidentally helps to reveal that language is not a tool—as many have falsely believed—but rather the foundation of thinking, emotional intelligence and creativity, the traits that makes us better than machines. And making the best of AI translation applications, we will be able to break the hegemony of colonial and neocolonial languages and allow all native speakers to use their own languages and thereby maintain their cultures and their ability to live with dignity and creatively. At the end of the essay, he concludes with a list of concrete policy recommendations.

In Chapter Two, “Taiwan’s Bilingual Policy: A Violation of Education Equality and a Suppression of Creativity (違反教育平權、扼殺創新力的臺灣「雙語政策」),” Professor Vincent Wu-Chang Chang<sup>2</sup> supports Professor Liao’s point of view that the Taiwanese government should forgo the

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bilingual policy and implement the former policy that has Mandarin as the Primary Language and English as the Secondary Language. Raising the complaints of teachers, parents, and students from elementary and secondary schools, Chang indicates that the implementation of the bilingual policy did not improve the students' English proficiency, but rather hindered their ability in learning other subjects and dampened their interests in studying English. He concludes that this will ultimately lead to the loss of critical thinking ability and consequently Taiwan's international competitiveness.

In her chapter "Language Education in the Age of AI (AI 時代的語言教學)," Professor June Yi-Chun Liu<sup>3</sup> contemplates challenges AI poses, language requirements in the age of AI, and the current bilingual policy. Liu concludes that the goal of foreign language education in the age of AI should be threefold: to strengthen L1 proficiency to ensure the ability of critical thinking, to equip students with sufficient English proficiency to complete tasks with the aid of AI tools, and to focus L2 education on the training of specialized experts.

In Chapter Three, "Standing in the Future: A Bilingual or Multilingual Taiwan in the Age of AI? (立足未來：AI 浪潮下的雙語或多語臺灣？)," Professor Sin-Yi Chang<sup>4</sup> points out that as AI has hugely influenced how language is taught and learnt, how to maintain and reinforce a multilingual Taiwan and clarify our understanding of foreign languages has become an important issue. She believes that with the development of AI, language education will remain important, yet its aim, method, and even the choice of language itself will be subject to change. Chang concludes that to arrive at an ideal foreign language policy, we should reflect on how we envision Taiwan's future from the perspective of language learning.

Part One of the book ends with "From Plato's Problem to Orwell's Problem: A Forward-Looking Language Policy for Taiwan in the Age of AI (前瞻臺灣 AI 時代的語言政策：從 Plato's Problem 與 Orwell's Problem 出發)," in which Professor One-Soon Her<sup>5</sup> takes both problems into consideration as he maintains that the language policy in Taiwan must thoroughly utilize the

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advantages of AI in order to maintain the multilingual characteristic of Taiwan. Her further emphasizes that a forwarding-looking policy should make use of AI to build a multilingual-friendly environment and actively develop technology that seeks to preserve Taiwan's National Languages.

Part Two of the book, which is concerned with issues facing foreign language departments in Taiwan, opens with Professor Shu-Ing Shyu's<sup>6</sup> "The Innovation of the Humanities in the Age of AI: The Crises and Opportunities of the Foreign Language Department (人工智慧時代的人文創新：外文系的挑戰與轉機)." Professor Shyu invites readers to reflect upon the value, position, and the crisis of foreign language departments. She provides three positive conditions: the strengths of the humanities training (specifically critical thinking and metacognition), the increase in the flexibility of courses and cross-disciplinary studies, and the establishment of a stronger foundation in humanities education. Shyu concludes that foreign language departments must be clear about their function in order to face future challenges.

In Chapter Six, "The Crises and Opportunities of the Foreign Language Department (外國語文學系的危機與轉機)," Professor Gi-Zen Liu<sup>7</sup> identifies three causes behind the crises and opportunities faced by foreign language departments in today's society: the declining birthrate in Taiwan (leading to a learner-centered teaching method), the increasing application of information and communication technology in language education, and the influence of Bilingual Education Policy and Going South Policy. Liu suggests that foreign language departments should develop more online courses, establish a licensing system, and allow short- and long-term research for faculty members and students to evaluate the outcomes.

In her chapter "Dancing with Machines: The Future of Foreign Language Departments in the Age of AI (與機器共舞：AI 時代外文系何去何從)," Professor Shu-Ching Chen<sup>8</sup> in the age of AI we are forced to contemplate how foreign language departments can help equip students face this

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<sup>7</sup> Distinguished Professor, Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, National Cheng Kung University.

<sup>8</sup> Lifetime Distinguished Professor, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, National Chung Hsing University.

inevitable trend. Chen contends that close reading, communication training, and diversity awareness are an integral part of the training they receive. Drawing from her own experiences, she further points out that as we move toward interdisciplinary learning, AI should be integrated into English language courses.

Professor Li-Hsin Hsu's<sup>9</sup> chapter, "Crisis and Critique: A Reflection on Close Reading, Machine Learning, and the Production of University Knowledge (危機與批判：細讀、機器學習與大學知識生產之反思)," consists of three parts. First, Hsu highlights the increasing challenges faced by the Foreign Language Department as ChatGPT gains traction. Second, with close reading as an important part of training, she elaborates on the strengths of studying in the foreign language department. Last but not least, Professor Hsu offered some sustainable suggestions on how the foreign language policy can be improved to benefit students in the age of AI.

Chapter Ten of the book is Professor Joan Chiung-Huei Chang's<sup>10</sup> "Becoming a Storyteller: The Inevitable Trend of Interdisciplinary Learning and AI Applications (做個說故事的人：跨領域的必然趨勢及 AI 的運用)." Chang states that to understand the challenges posed by AI, we must first define the role of foreign language departments today. She goes on to provide examples of interdisciplinary courses offered by foreign language departments in partnership with other fields, suggesting that the department is expected to produce talent with storytelling skills in these collaborations. Chang concludes that, in the age of AI, the department should serve as the foundation of the humanities, on which AI relies for assistance and correction.

The book ends with another contribution from Liao, titled "The Golden Age of Humanities: The Creative Transformation of Foreign Language Departments in the Age of AI (人文的黃金時代：AI 時代外文系的創意轉型)." Liao stresses that the age of AI has brought forth the need of transformation of foreign language departments. He points out that with the ability to provide "creative prompts" to AI becoming crucial, the cultivation of creativity would become the core of education. And nowhere else can creativity be trained in the immersion in literature. Thus, to

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<sup>10</sup> Professor, Department of English; Associate Dean, College of Liberal Arts, National Taiwan Normal University.

provide all levels of education with such manpower, foreign language departments and Chinese departments as well as other disciplines in the humanities need to make do transformations accordingly. Liao concludes that while the need to acquire a new language may dwindle following the advance of AI, creativity will remain vital and in fact boost the status of the foreign language departments.

These short chapter summaries show that *Language Policies in the New Age of AI* offers a multi-faceted and multi-disciplinary discussion of the language policies in a soon-to-be AI-dominant age. Through initiating this dialogue in Taiwan and exchanging ideas across the fields of literature, language education, and linguistics, IHS shoulders up the responsibility of proposing forward-looking language policies to the Taiwanese government. The book is scheduled to be published in January 2025. In the meantime, please see the English translation of the forward by the editor, Professor Sebastian Hsien-Hao Liao, Dean of IHS. For the latest publication news, please visit the website of National Taiwan University Press: <https://shorturl.at/adQlq>.

## Preface: The Necessity of Foreseeing the Future

This book can be considered a sequel to *The Fantasy of Bilingual Nation*, published by our institute, the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HIS) in 2022. When compiling the previous book, the factor of AI was already touched upon by two authors when talking about the issues of creativity and translation, but played nevertheless only an as yet marginal role. However, three months after the publication of that book, ChatGPT made a groundbreaking debut. This revolutionary emergence of this AI application changed the trajectory of the entire world. While the far-reaching implications of this shift may take time to fully comprehend, one thing is clear: it has fundamentally impacted foreign language policies. The so-called “bilingual nation”, already demonstrably flawed for various reasons, now appears even more outdated in light of ChatGPT’s advent.

Policy-making requires foresight. It must consider the future not merely from the perspective of the past or present, but by envisioning the future itself. Furthermore, this future should extend not just three to five years ahead but ten to twenty years down the line. From this perspective, the significance of ChatGPT’s emergence lies not in the introduction of a specific AI software but in heralding the arrival of a new AI era.

AI, which experienced a lull in the 1980s, has recently surged back to prominence, fundamentally altering the relationship between humans and technology. For the first time, humanity has felt an existential threat posed by technology. Even Geoffrey Hinton, the “godfather of large language models (LLMs),” who initially dismissed concerns about AI’s dangers, was deeply shaken by ChatGPT’s debut. While it is essential to actively regulate AI development to prevent it from spiraling out of control, reversing technological advancement is impossible. Thus, the unavoidable challenge is how to actively engage with AI to maximize human welfare.

This book specifically adopts AI as its primary reference point, addressing the unfinished discussions in *The Fantasy of Bilingual Nation*, namely incorporating AI as a major impact on language policy. On the one hand, it

further exposes the impracticality and irrelevance of bilingual policies; on the other hand, it aims to go a step further by offering policy recommendations, concretely responding to the considerations and directions for language policy in the new AI era.

*The Fantasy of Bilingual Nation* in fact predicted that advances in translation software would significantly reduce the general public's need for foreign languages. Just three months later, ChatGPT's emergence fully realized this prediction. Beyond its extraordinary translation capabilities reducing reliance on foreign languages, ChatGPT also profoundly impacted the professional study of foreign languages. Consequently, we are compelled to offer more specific recommendations regarding the academic study of foreign languages and the nation's overall language policies. This necessitates a major reimagining and repositioning of foreign language departments to align with the nation's future, aiming for a mutually beneficial synergy.

This book includes the productive results of two key events in two parts: "The Future is Here: Reconfiguring Foreign Language Policy" and "The Crises and Opportunities of the Foreign Language Department." The first part presents suggestions for foreign language policies from scholars across various disciplines within foreign language studies. Since foreign language policy is inevitably intertwined with domestic language policy, adjustments to the latter are also addressed. The second section delves into how foreign language departments can transform to face the tidal wave of change brought by this new era. To ensure the contributions in this section have substantial policy significance, IHS specifically invited representatives from key foreign language departments across the island to participate in the brainstorming as well as the writing process.

Under the overwhelming influence of neoliberalism, the humanities disciplines are generally perceived as lacking practical significance. With the arrival of AI, these disciplines seem to have been further struck by a devastating blow. However, the crisis facing the humanities has its roots, and to some extent, it stems from a self-weakened position. For a considerable period, under the influence of the West, the humanities tried to emulate the self-positioning of the hard sciences, gradually becoming



“over-specialized” and eventually retreating into the margins, which led to a decline in their general influence. As a result, the humanities seem to have lost their foothold in the development of technology/economy. However, every profession actually requires the same key abilities derived from the humanities—namely emotional intelligence and creativity—especially in the outstanding individuals, who often possess an extraordinary degree of such abilities. Yet, this influence has largely remained in the background and gone unrecognized in the past. With the advent of the AI era, these key abilities have now been foregrounded, and this new recognition will restore the importance of the humanities, potentially ushering in a golden age for the field.

Creativity can be divided into three elements or levels. From knowledge absorption, to critical thinking, to imaginative creation—do any of these levels not require the training provided by the humanities? First, knowledge absorption requires a solid language foundation. To absorb knowledge with precision and nuance, one must be proficient in one language; otherwise, it would be like using a coarse-meshed fishing net to catch fish, unable to capture the fine details, and the knowledge gained would naturally be rough. Second, after distinguishing differences with a proficient language, one must also have the ability to analyze strengths and weaknesses and discover problems (i.e., critical thinking). The humanities, being a discipline of speculative reasoning, are the main source of critical thinking skills. Finally, after identifying problems, one must be able to present the significance of the issue and propose solutions. The imaginative and creative abilities required here are even more fundamental to the humanities, with literature being at its core. Moreover, neuroscience has proven that such abilities can only be possible with proficient language skills. Yet, the fundamental driving force for creativity comes from emotional intelligence. Without delicate emotions, one cannot recognize their own nuanced needs, nor can they empathize with others and understand the needs of society. Without this, there can be no motivation to generate the aforementioned three abilities, and of course, no remarkable creativity.

Without sufficient emotional intelligence and creativity, in the AI era, individuals are akin to “sub-AI creatures” with little survival ability. Take

the latest generative AI software, Sora, as an example. With such software, in the future movie industry, it seems all talents may no longer be necessary, except for the director and screenwriter, who can be the same person. The reason is simple: this almost "dumb AI" software is operable by anyone, so the true winners will be those with real creativity: individuals who can replace an entire army in the movie industry. A recent job in the United States, the "prompt engineer," illustrates this evolutionary direction. However, this title is actually misleading. Given the speed of AI's development, issuing commands to AI will soon be so simple that even children will easily handle it. Therefore, the skill humanity needs to train is the ability to issue "creative" commands. Such training has little to do with engineering, and it would be too late to start learning creative command use in university. Emotional intelligence and creativity must be cultivated from an early age and continuously nurtured throughout various educational stages. The humanities and social sciences, particularly the fields of literature and the arts, will be the underlying literacy that everyone must be equipped with in the future. Enhancing humanistic literacy is the only path forward for humanity in the face of the AI onslaught.

The claim about the "over-specialization" of the humanities does not imply that these disciplines do not require specialized training; rather, it warns against the mistake of treating these fields as isolated, peripheral subjects belonging to a select few, neglecting the role of humanities and humanistic values as the foundation of all disciplines. Therefore, the transformation of university humanities disciplines, especially language departments (including both Chinese and foreign languages), is urgent. The transformation of the humanities can also be seen as part of the broader shift in general education. While the planning of general education is well-intentioned, it often becomes sidelined due to the prevailing pragmatic (especially the version strengthened by neoliberalism) educational culture, which does not see "holistic education" as having career relevance. However, with the advent of the AI era, we are finally seeing the true meaning of the human and the necessity of being the "whole person" reflected in the mirror of AI. General education is not about making students learn a little bit of everything; rather, it is about encouraging them to reflect on what it means to be human and, more importantly, to become

a complete individual—someone who is not shallow in knowledge, nor devoid of emotional intelligence and creativity like a machine. Only then will humanity have the opportunity to lead in the AI-dominated era, still possessing the ability to guide AI. Of course, I must emphasize again that this kind of questioning and cultivation should not wait until higher education; higher education should be the final stage of integrative development.

The role of an institute for advanced studies is to address the fragmentation of knowledge by integrating it with up-to-date humanistic values. Therefore, the aforementioned two events organized by IHS, as well as the publication of this book, are not limited to rarefied discussions on the periphery or self-pitying expressions of dissatisfaction. Instead, they represent crucial reflections and foundational outcomes regarding the renewal of humanistic values, the cultivation of social creativity, and the autonomy of human destiny as we formally enter the AI era.