



‘Adoah’: A demonstration of familiarity or an insult?

‘PROMINENT’ OR ‘HIGH’: While most Taiwanese think ‘adoah’ is a humorous word used to refer to Westerners, some believe it is a little insulting and insensitive and should be avoided in public and forbidden on the airwaves

BY **DAN BLOOM**
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

Are you an *adoah*? And do you like being called *adoah* by friends, co-workers or complete strangers on the street? And maybe even by your wife or husband?

Whatever your feelings about this colorful and humorous Taiwanese slang word for “foreigner,” read the following with a sense of humor.

Although the term is used to mean a “foreigner,” it is mainly used to refer to Westerners. Japanese are never called *adoah*, nor are Indonesians, Indians, Vietnamese or Filipinos.

While many Taiwanese academics and politicians have been critical of Kuo Kuan-ying (郭冠英), a former government press officer in Toronto who was fired for using such words as *taibazi* (台巴子, Taiwanese rednecks) and *wokou* (倭寇, Japanese pirates) in blog posts written under a pen name, most Taiwanese still feel it is okay to use the word *adoah* to describe Westerners.

But some people feel that the word *adoah* rankles and should be avoided in public and forbidden on the airwaves.

Over the last few years, a few expat Internet forums have discussed the expression, with both supportive and scornful reviews and plenty of humorous rejoinders.

‘DOK-DOK’

One popular opinion is that the expression means “prominent nose” and comes from an old Taiwanese term — *dok-dok* — meaning “prominent” or “high” when describing noses.

Most Taiwanese say the term is not a slur or an insult, but more of a compliment than anything else, although delivered with a dollop of humor.

Some expats feel that while 60 years ago *adoah* might have been a humorous and friendly word for Westerners with a “high” nose bridge, people, especially TV hosts

such as Jacky Wu (吳宗憲) who use the term on TV shows with abandon, should drop the word.

Chen Chun-kai (陳君愷), a professor of history at Fugen Catholic University, said in an e-mail: “Although most Taiwanese truly think *adoah* is a humorous word, if most Western foreigners in Taiwan hate that word ... then that word is no doubt a bad word and should not be used anymore by our people.”

Chen added: “Confucius said: ‘Do not do unto others what you would not want others to do unto you.’ So if we Taiwanese don’t like to hear Mainlanders calling

at National Dong Hwa University, said by e-mail: “I must admit that I never thought that *adoah* was a bad or negative term, and I am sure that people here use it as merely a humorous word and not in any negative sense at all.”

“However, and this is important, this common usage does not mean that *adoah* is a good term, even though it is not used in a negative or pejorative way,” Chi said.

“The most important thing about language when it is used to refer to different national or ethnic or racial groups are the subjective feelings of people being addressed,” Chi said.

FEATURE

“Taiwanese people are not as sensitive as Westerners to some terms associated with a person’s body, such as weight or height or the eyes. Some Taiwanese also feel uncomfortable when they are called ‘fat’ or ‘short’ or ‘small eyes,’ but in general, Taiwanese are not so sensitive.”

— Liu Yu-hsia, editor of *Taiwan Tribune*

as *taibazi*, then Taiwanese should stop using that word *adoah* in reference to Westerners. There is no need to keep using the word *adoah* anymore, if those who hear the word don’t like it.”

“We Taiwanese are still crippled by a long history of linguistic and ethnic slurs, even now. We need to fight for our freedom and establish a new nation with justice. If we can achieve this, I believe that we will also learn more from people in other countries,” Chen said.

Another professor, Chi Chun-chieh (紀駿傑), who teaches in the Department of Indigenous Cultures

“In terms of the word *adoah* as it is used to speak about or address Westerners in Taiwan ... the shape of a person’s nose is not relevant compared to his or her more important personal characteristics,” he said.

Martin de Jonge, a Canadian expat who has lived in Taiwan for more than a dozen years, pointed out another way of looking at the issue.

“As I come from a country where the government has a long history of crafting, launching, tracking, monitoring, refashioning and relaunching information campaigns designed to facilitate

intercultural understanding by informing, sensitizing and enlightening its various cultural groups, I sometimes take it for granted that obvious social dysfunction here in Taiwan should iron itself out in due process and in due time time by the local [Chinese-language] media and through public statements from leaders,” Jonge said.

SENSITIVITY

Speaking from the perspective of someone who has lived abroad since 1992, Liu Yu-hsia (劉玉霞), the Taiwanese editor of the *Taiwan Tribune* in New Jersey, a newspaper for Taiwanese expatriates, said: “It’s been many years that I have not heard this term *adoah*. I used it when I was little. I agree with you. *Adoah* is a little insulting and insensitive from an American’s viewpoint. It is just like calling somebody ‘fat.’ However, when Taiwanese call a Westerner *adoah*, it is not meant to insult the person.”

“But the point is, if the person being addressed or spoken of doesn’t like the term, then it shouldn’t be used,” Liu added.

“Taiwanese people are not as sensitive as Westerners to some terms associated with a person’s body, such as weight or height or the eyes. Some Taiwanese also feel uncomfortable when they are called ‘fat’ or ‘short’ or ‘small eyes,’ but in general, Taiwanese are not so sensitive,” she said.

“The next time someone refers to you as an *adoah*, tell him or her, seriously, that you don’t like to be described in that way. I believe that person will not do it anymore,” she said.

When asked if Taiwanese expats in the US ever call their neighbors *adoah*, Liu replied: “We usually don’t, because there are so many *adoah* here. Sometimes we call them *laowai*, but we forget that the actual foreigners are us.”

The jury is still out on whether the word *adoah* serves a useful purpose today or not. The real judges will be the Taiwanese themselves.

Latter-day Saints mark 52 years of carrying out their mission in Taiwan

BY **JENNY W. HSU**
STAFF REPORTER

With “no success can compensate the failure in the home” as their rallying cry, for 52 years, thousands of young Mormon men and women, often on bikes, have been carrying out their missions in Taiwan.

“I am in Taiwan because I want to share the principles that my family had taught me when I was growing up,” said 20 year-old Brady Rice from Alpine, Utah.

Rice’s clean-shaven all-American looks are not the image most people associate with the word “elder” on his nametag.

In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, commonly known as the Mormon Church, the word “elder” is given to signify a high-level of priesthood. Latter-day Saints believe that all men, at age 19, who have been called to serve a two-year proselytizing mission, must receive this type of priesthood before they can wear the black nametag on their chests.

Young women at age 21 are also encouraged to devote 18 months to a mission.

Over the past few years, Taiwan has seen an increase in the number of senior missionaries. The Sparrows, a couple from Colorado Spring, Colorado, spearhead much of the Mormons’ local humanitarian efforts. Most recently, they brought boxes of baby blankets knitted by church members to the children at a local Catholic charity.

The main duty of the missionaries, said Norman Neilson, the president of the Taipei Mission, is to “share the gospel of Jesus Christ and tell the Taiwanese brothers and sisters that families can be together forever.”

As a young man in 1971, Neilson served in Taiwan, and he recalls a country largely covered with rice paddies. The number of Mormons in Taiwan at the time was about 4,400, mostly US missionaries.

Nearly four decades later, its membership has grown 10-fold to 47,000 and its missionaries have to move through heavy traffic instead of dodging water buffalos.

The missionaries, who cover three missions in Taipei, Taichung and Kaohsiung, also come from a variety of places, including the UK, Canada, Australia, Germany, Indonesia, New Zealand, Singapore, the Philippines and Hong Kong. There are also a handful of native Taiwanese.

“But a few things have remained the same and that is the hardworking ethic of the Taiwanese people and their love and commitment to their families,” Neilson said.

Tanner Jacobson, who hails from Chandler, Arizona, said the strong emphasis on family was a common thread between the Mormon church and Taiwanese culture.

“It’s amazing to see how hard people here work to provide for their families,” he said.

Rice said he had found the topic of families and respect for ancestors is a good icebreaker. Missionaries often encourage people to set aside Monday nights as “Family Home Evening” so families can spend time together. A church-published handbook has ideas and topics for family nights.

“It is a special time to renew friendships and teach children the principles and values you want them to learn. If you don’t teach them, who will?” Neilson said.

The idea has been emulated by the government to promote more quality time for parents and their kids.

Missionaries are also required to volunteer in their local communities, and many have done so by helping people move, volunteering at hospitals, serving as crossing guards, giving free English lessons or participating in beautification projects such as the World Beach Clean-up Day. A Filipina missionary, Reyes, works with migrant workers from the Philippines.

In April last year, Taichung Mayor Jason Hu (胡志強) enlisted several Mormon missionaries to help correct the English used in city street signs as part of his effort to make Taichung a more English-friendly environment.

The church also offers career counseling for both members and non-members and programs to help smokers and alcoholics to end their addictions. Several

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missionaries have spoken at the Tucheng Jail on the danger of substance abuse.

However, some bloggers in Taiwan have been critical of the church and its missionaries, calling them “ignorant, annoying, obnoxious and brainwashed” and slamming the church as racist and homophobic.

One person who asked to be identified only by the surname Wang, criticized the Mormon church as a cult and said its members are instructed to recruit as many believers as possible in order to secure their place in heaven.

“That’s why they wouldn’t leave me alone for a long time,” Wang said.

The Latter-day Saints also have to deal with their historical links to polygamy. The HBO show *Big Love* about a polygamist Mormon family has been aired in Taiwan. The Latter-day Saints stress that polygamy has not been practiced in the church for more than a century and members who are discovered to have multiple spouses are excommunicated.

Jaime Marbury from Texas said she rarely gets asked about polygamy, but she has had to learn to deal with rejection.

“Most people are more interested in why we are so happy all the time,” she said.

“It is hard to hear rejections, but whenever I get rejected, I just think about of the message we are sharing and all the good things that have happened and the wonderful people we have met,” she said.

PIGEON POST

BCCT to host charity dinner



The British Chamber of Commerce in Taipei (BCCT) is holding a charity cocktail party to raise funds for Harmony Home, a non-profit organization that provides assistance to men, women and children living with HIV/AIDS. The cocktail party will be held on Friday from 7pm to 10pm at Lili. For registration, call the BCCT at (02) 2547-1199.

Canadian trade chief to talk at AmCham meet



The American Chamber of Commerce in Taichung is holding a dinner meeting at 7pm next Tuesday. The guest speaker for the night is Ron Macintosh, director of the Canadian Trade Office in Taiwan, who will give a talk on *Global Recession, Cross-Straits Change, and Canada-Taiwan Ties: Sustaining Progress Amid Challenge*. The cost for the dinner is NT\$700 for AmCham members and NT\$800 for non-members. For more information, call River Chen at 0955-038-733 or (04) 2471-8133, or visit www.amchamtaichung.org.

Master chef to present Swiss cuisine



The Trade Office of Swiss Industries and the International Food Cultural Exchange will jointly present a cooking demonstration of authentic Swiss cuisine on Friday in Taipei. The activity will take place from 3:30pm to 5pm on the third floor of Eslite Bookstore in Xinyi District (信義). W. Isler, the master chef invited to do the cooking demonstration, has 35 years of experience in four and five-star hotels in Europe. Admission is free, but seats are limited, the organizer said.

STAFF WRITER



LENDING A HAND

A Canadian makes burgers at a charity event organized by the Tachung Community Development Association in Taichung City on Friday to raise funds to cover medical expenses for the child of a Canadian couple. The event was well-received by Taiwanese and foreigners and raised around NT\$180,000.

PHOTO: SU CHIN-FENG, TAIPEI TIMES



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