

# The Next Stage in the Evolution of Formosan Literature

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Literary creation has three essential ingredients. One is the creator's environment, whether social, political, cultural, or circumstantial. Another is the creator's sensitivity to that environment. And the last is the language in which the creator creates. From the time of Lōa Hô 賴和 and then Ng Chhuk-liù<sup>1</sup> 吳濁流 to the era of Ng Chhun-bêng 黃春明, Ông Cheng-hô 王禎和, and Sòng Tèk-lâi 宋澤萊, Formosan literature<sup>2</sup> has become thematically rich and ever more masterful. One could say Formosan hiong-thó 鄉土 ("country") literature is in full flower. However, this body of literature, although very much about Formosan things and happenings, has been composed in foreign languages — Japanese and Mandarin Chinese — rather than in Formosan languages. And this Japanese- and Mandarin-language literature about Formosa and Formosans is substantially a kind of translated or semi-translated literature, as *The True Story of Ah Q*<sup>3</sup> would have been if Lu Xun 魯迅 had had to write it in Japanese. In order to pen concepts and conversations that arose or were perceived in Taioanese (or another Formosan language), the writer must first mentally translate them into the Japanese or the Mandarin. Some precision, finesse, life and warmth is lost during this intangible and almost inevitable procedure. Now if the reader happens to grasp content and meanings best in Taioanese, they may be compelled to mentally reverse-translate back into Taioanese as they go along; some precision, finesse, life and warmth is again lost. This round-trip "loss in translation" has long plagued Formosan literature.

Clearly, the next high for Formosan literature must come on the back of authorship in Formosan languages and broadened readership in the same. Only such a literary flowering can be said to have grown from Formosan soil.

Formosan literary composition does face unique linguistic difficulties. The work of many specialists will be needed to build effective and accurate systems.<sup>4</sup> Until such systems become widespread, this writer advocates the use of Hàn-jī 漢

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<sup>1</sup> Translator's note: In Hakka; or Gō Chók-liû, Ngō Chók-liû, or Ngō Tók-liû in various dialects of Taioanese.

<sup>2</sup> In context, it is clear that the author means *modern* Formosan literature in a Hàn-jī-based format.

<sup>3</sup> Translator's note: A famous Mandarin novel, referred to as "A-Q Sióng-siōng" (阿Q想像) in the original of this article.

<sup>4</sup> Translator's note: *Linguistic difficulties* ("語言學上困難" 所在) refers to the problem of diverging, contested Hàn-jī usage — under "modern" (Mandarin-conscious) paradigms — for Hakka and especially Taioanese. *Systems* ("系統") refers to standards for Hàn-jī usage.

字<sup>5</sup> mixed with Lô-má-jī 羅馬字 (romanization). This flattens the learning curve for beginners, with a view to spreading the writing and reading of Taioanese and Hakka to progressively broader circles.

Since 1986, in such a mode, I have written a novella — “Lí Chiòh-thâu ê Ku-koài Pēn” (李石頭 ê 古怪病); four short stories — “Bí-lē ê Chiuⁿ-ló Nâ” (美麗 ê 樟腦林), “Chhut-kok Chit Hāng Tāi-chì” (出國這項代誌), “Tōa-thâu Peng Ng Bêng-liông” (大頭兵黃明良), and “Hui-chhia-lú” (飛車女); and several poems and treatises. These works are to comprise an anthology entitled *Tân Lûi Tâi-gú Bûn-hák Soán-chhîp* 陳雷台語文學選集, to be proofed and published through *Tâi-bûn Thong-sìn*. I invite readers of the anthology to mentally translate passages from the original into Mandarin for comparison, to better sample the difference between mental translation and a Taioanese original.

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<sup>5</sup> Or “Tâi-gú hoat-im ê Hàn-jī” (台語發音 ê 漢字) in the original — literally “Sinoglyphs (‘Chinese characters’) in Taioanese pronunciation,” expressly confirming the use of Hàn-jī as instruments for writing Taioanese (and Hakka) directly. In modern Formosa there is a presumption that Hàn-jī can only be used for Mandarin (and Japanese), meaning that Hakka and Taioanese can only be “written” via mental translation into Mandarin, especially in serious contexts; this presumption was even stronger — pretty much absolute — in Cold War times, under the Chinese Nationalist dictatorship. The author wants to make sure the reader understands that mental translation is *not* what he means by using Hàn-jī to write Taioanese.