

My Hopes for *Tâi-bûn Thong-sìn*

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Brother Tēⁿ Liông-kng 鄭良光 called me a week ago to tell me about the *Tâi-bûn Thong-sìn* project. He wanted me to write an article or two for the first issue. At first I felt the exercise was quite pointless. We've come a long way since the 1970s; the Formosan diaspora has its own newspapers these days. After exchanging ideas on the phone, though, I changed my mind in favor of publishing this newsletter expressly for those who care about written Taioanese, on the Island and abroad.

I thought back 16 years to New York in 1975. I remembered working to publish *Tâi-gú Thong-sìn* 台語通訊 with a few members of the Center for the Study and Promotion of Taiwanese Languages (*Tâi-oân Gú-bûn Thui-kóng Tiong-sim* 台灣語文推廣中心; "TTT"). Sure enough, there it was in my bookcase: a set of *Tâi-gú Thong-sìn* issues, vintage 1975. The first issue had come out on August 15, 1975, with a run of 200 copies. Scriptwise, it was all in *Hàn-jī* (Sinographs, or "Chinese characters")¹; so was the second issue, but with some romanization (*Lô-má Pêh-ōe-jī*) in parentheses to guide the reader. From the third issue, *Tâi-gú Thong-sìn* began publishing in a Sino-Latin (*Hàn-Lô*) hybrid script. The fourth issue saw *Tâi-gú Thong-sìn* renamed *Tâi-oân Gú-bûn Goéh-pò* 台灣語文月報 (*Taiwanese Language and Cultural Monthly*) with a switch to a newspaper layout, and an expanded run of 1000 copies.

Tâi-gú Thong-sìn was started for much the same purpose as *Tâi-bûn Thong-sìn*: to spread Taioanese-language education, and to serve as a sandbox for written Taioanese. However, the Formosan community lacked a newspaper at the time. In response to the wishes of many in the community, *Tâi-gú Thong-sìn* was renamed *Goéh-pò* ("monthly newspaper") after three issues and evolved toward becoming a newspaper. Sure enough, in 1978 *Goéh-pò* would become the *Tâi-oân Lûn-pò* 台灣論報 (*Taiwan Tribune*), precursor to *Asia Journal* (亞洲商報), established in 1980.²

Nowadays, we overseas Formosans have our own Chinese newspapers. The Chinese print media in general has grown severalfold in the last 16 years, in terms of quality as well as quantity. *Tâi-bûn Thong-sìn* is not to be a me-too addition to that throng. While *Tâi-gú Thong-sìn* did catalyze the emergence of a newspaper industry in the Formosan community, it also sold out the overseas

¹ Translator's note: This does not imply that the writing was in a language other than Taioanese.

² Translator's note: *Tâi-oân Lûn-pò* was a Taioanese-Mandarin mixed-language publication; *Asia Journal* was a Mandarin newspaper.

Tâi-gú-bûn effort. It is hoped that *Tâi-bûn Thong-sìn* will adopt *Tâi-gú Thong-sìn*'s aborted mission, and not only that, but also expand the network to the scholars and advocates of written Taioanese within the Island.

In the '70s, advocating for Taioanese within the Island was forbidden; Romanized Bibles were being confiscated from the churches, and Embree's Taioanese-English dictionary was banned. Taioanese radio and TV programming was also restricted. In contrast, in the past two or three years, it has become fashionable to learn Taioanese. Speeches in Taioanese have become essential to running for office; Taioanese-challenged businesspeople don't get much business; and "cram schools" for Taioanese are popping up one after another. *Tâi-bûn Thong-sìn* must break on back into the Island, so that the diaspora may join forces with the Island. If the work being done overseas were to lose touch with the Island, it would be no better than a bicycle missing a wheel.

Three or four sensational shootings or cases of abduction or blackmail took place in Formosa late last year (1990) while this writer was there. The Lîm Lâi-hok 林來福 case, especially, left an impression on me. This was not just a shooting. Lîm Lâi-hok was a young victim of the ill-conceived language policies that have prevailed in Formosa. After his arrest, Lîm confessed that the experience of getting fined during grade school for speaking Taioanese was part of why he wound up on the wrong path. He had been unable to pay the fine. The teacher went to his home to force his mother to pay! Lîm would not forget this injustice. The dissatisfaction and antipathy he felt toward society as an adult resulted from being humiliated from childhood for being a Taioanese speaker. Lîm's resentment had festered and boiled over, and one day he confronted society with a gun! When I read his confession in the newspaper, I felt sympathy along with indignation. Today, you and I shall not fire guns at society — but we shall confront the expat community and Island society at the point of a pen! We shall awaken those who look down on our mother tongue. And through *Tâi-bûn Thong-sìn*, we shall concretely set forth how to elevate and dignify our mother tongue, and how to promote education and writing in our mother tongue.

The conditions very much favor the spread of written Taioanese as well as the publication of *Tâi-bûn Thong-sìn*. Computing has advanced. There are now word-processing systems for Taioanese; typing Taioanese through romanization helps correct and "level" one's pronunciation. *Tâi-bûn Thong-sìn* ought to expose readers to Taioanese computing as well as a modernized form of written Taioanese. What I mean by "modernized" includes the following: it should, first, reflect current idiom and forms of expression; second, it should take the newer loanwords in stride; third, nouns related to technology should be standardized; and it should fourthly provide for written expression of modern

thought and abstract concepts. Another key application of the technology would be a computerized system for teaching written Taioanese. This too is a matter to discuss via *Tâi-bûn Thong-sìn*.

In sum, this writer hopes *Tâi-bûn Thong-sìn* can achieve the following:

1. Carry on *Tâi-gú Thong-sìn*'s unfinished mission.
2. Become a community sandbox for people worldwide who care about Taioanese.
3. Open the floor to discussion of writing systems, and entertain submissions proposing schemes of all sorts from both within the Island and beyond.
4. Serve as a space where Taioanese-language schools and instructors can exchange pedagogical wisdom.
5. Encourage writers to pen novels, poetry, jokes, and so on in Taioanese.
6. Advocate modern thought and writing; urge people to write on technology-related themes in Taioanese.
7. Take part in designing computer-based learning systems, in step with the trend toward the computerization of written Taioanese.

Publishing magazines can be a grueling business, but we must bravely take this first step of a million, so that our Taioanophone culture may have a future.