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(Language Planning with a Hidden Agenda?! Robert Cheng and the Question of Written Taiwanese)

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## NOTE DE L'ÉDITEUR

Translated from the French original by Jonathan Hall

- 1 In this work, Maja Buchler surveys the works of Robert Cheng, who is one of the best known linguistic experts on the Taiwanese language. Its publication is therefore a valuable addition to the series dedicated to the southern Min language (*minnanhua*). Robert Cheng was born in 1931 and is one of the Taiwanese exiles living in the United States. He gained his Ph.D. in 1966 at the University of Indiana for his thesis, "Some Aspects of Mandarin Syntax", and he became a lecturer in Chinese at the University of Hawaii in 1970. His works are critical of the Kuomintang's language policies for their exclusive focus on the promotion of Mandarin. At a time when the KMT was resolved on the elimination of the Taiwanese language, this stance could be considered a political act. The basic premise of all his works is that the *minnanhua* is threatened with extinction.
- 2 Maja Buchler defends Robert Cheng's position and maintains his opposition to official language policy. She puts forward the following three main arguments: that Taiwanese,

which she defines as a regional language, is a written language; that the standardisation and codification of the language does not mean breaking away from China; and, that it could be granted official recognition. In support of these arguments she analyses Robert Cheng's works in the light Robert Cooper's theories in his *Language Planning and Social Change* <sup>1</sup>.

- 3 The first part of her book deals briefly with the ethnolinguistic situation in Taiwan, from the Ming dynasty through to the Japanese colonial period (1895-1945) and the Nationalist regime. In this part she lists the various systems for transcribing Mandarin, Taiwanese and the Taiwanese indigenous languages.
- 4 The second section is devoted to a selection of Robert Cheng's sociolinguistic works. It is organised around four major thematic concerns: language policies, the structural characteristics of the Taiwanese language, its standardisation, and its preservation. In each case the author advances Robert Cheng's own leading arguments.
- 5 In the third section she tests these arguments against Cooper's theories and concludes that they are valid. This means that she endorses his aim that the Taiwanese language should be treated as a possible equal partner of Mandarin in Taiwan's language and education policies.
- 6 Her book is interesting for the considerable store of information it contains. For example, the reader learns that Robert Cheng was in favour of a mixture of Chinese characters and Roman script (*hanluo*), which was associated with a project for the adaptation of Taiwanese to the requirements of information technology. The author also examines the relationship between this initiative and the work of other Taiwanese language specialists, such as Hong Wei-ren, Ekki Lu (Lu Yiqi), Pai Chou (Zhou Baixiang), and Tan Keng-chiu (Chen Qingzhou).
- 7 Maja Buchler acknowledges that Robert Cheng and his companions had links with overseas Taiwanese political activists, but in general she does not pay sufficient attention to the political context of his works. Some consideration of the University of Hawaii's programmes for the revival of the Hawaiian language, through information technology and on-line education, would have thrown light on Cheng's intention to develop computer programming in the Taiwanese language <sup>2</sup>. She could also have attempted to assess the political and educational issues influencing the language policies of the Kuomintang. It is regrettable that she did not give more attention to situating the complexity of these questions of language within the wider post-war political context.

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## NOTES

1. Cambridge University Press, 1989.

2. Mark Warschauer, *Electronic Literacies: language, culture, and power in on-line education*, New Jersey, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999.