The Ministry of Culture's budget for establishing a Hoklo (commonly known as Taiwanese) TV channel has been passed by the Cabinet. If everything goes smoothly, a Public Television Service Hoklo channel will start airing next year.

The government established Hakka TV and Taiwan Indigenous TV during former president Chen Shui-bian's (□□□) administration.

After President Tsai Ing-wen (□□□) assumed office, the nationwide Hakka Radio was established.

Regrettably, there is neither an official TV channel nor a radio station for Hoklo, a language used by more than 70 percent of the nation's population.

During Chen's presidency, the government allocated NT$3.45 billion (US$112.3 million at the current exchange rate) to establish the Taiwan Broadcasting System Hoklo TV station and Southern Operation Center at the Kaohsiung Multi-functional Commerce & Trade Park.

However, when former president Ma Ying-jeou (□□□) took office, he asked then-Government Information Office minister Vanessa Shih (□□□) to re-evaluate the plan, which, plainly speaking, meant "cancel the project."

This was quite expected by Hoklo language advocates.

Last year, civic groups promoting the establishment of a Hoklo TV station established the Alliance for the Promotion of a Public Hoklo Television Station.

Thanks to the alliance's efforts over the past year, together with the ministry's national language development division, which was established in 2016 to plan a national languages

development act, there is finally a possibility that a Hoklo channel will be established next year.

However, is there reason to be optimistic that it will actually happen?

Hoklo is the only language lacking legal protection, while Hakka and Aboriginal languages are protected by the Hakka Basic Act (□□□□□) and the Aboriginal Language Development Act (□□□□□□□□□□).

Furthermore, Hoklo is the nation's only native language not listed as a national language and there is no agency dedicated to the protection of Hoklo.

The reason that the budget for a Hoklo channel was passed is that Premier William Lai (□□□) coordinated a meeting on Thursday last week.

The ministry included a special budget of NT$400 million to subsidize the Public Television Service's establishment of a Hoklo channel in the annual budget for next year.

This could once again be blocked if the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) wins a legislative majority in 2020. The question, therefore, is how to go about establishing a permanent Hoklo TV channel.

The answer is quite simple: The legislature should act swiftly to pass the national languages development act.

The draft act almost passed its third reading on May 18, but was blocked by the KMT and sent to cross-party negotiations. It then failed to pass the third reading in the extraordinary legislative session that started on June 11, making the establishment of the Hoklo channel uncertain.

If there is no law mandating a Hoklo channel, and such a channel must rely on a special budget that is allocated yearly, receiving the subsidy one year is no guarantee that it will receive it the following year. That is very worrying.

Hopefully, the government and the opposition will be able to put aside political differences and allow the legislature to pass the national languages development act in the next session to facilitate the stability and prosperity of a Hoklo channel.

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