

Bioptic driving from Texas to Taiwan: A personal experience

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Taiwan's low vision persons have been experiencing tremendous difficulties in driving their vehicles legally with or without BiOptic telescopes, though many states in the U.S. have allowed low vision persons to obtain their driver license for more than 30 years. The following is about the author's personal experience regarding pursuing America's Texas State driver license and a brief comparison between driving in Texas and Taiwan.

Earning a driver license means a sense of self confidence and self identity with peers. Thus, when I first got my Texas driver license in 1994, I felt like a dream come true or like converting "mission impossible" into "mission possible". For example, I would have had a girl friend earlier, if I had known I could drive a car. This unusual experience is especially meaningful for a country like Taiwan, that perceives people with visual disabilities cannot drive a car. As a doctoral student at the University of Texas at Austin and with the help from Texas Commission for the Blind, I was examined by a local low vision specialist and also prescribed a bioptic telescope (4x10). Following the policy of the Texas Department of Public Safety, I was issued a driver license after four strict road tests. In order to drive legally in Taiwan, I applied for an International Driving Permit from the American Automobile Association (AAA). I failed to renew my Texas driver license in 1998, I had to come back to do a retest and fortunately I passed pass the road test in one trial and this time I can renew it on-line in 2005. However, the AAA's International Driving Permit only valids for one year. I have been working and driving in Taiwan since I graduated from UT in 1995, I have to internationally mail my application to the AAA to get the permit every year. So far, things work out well with my driving and license.

With respect to my driving behaviors, I occasionally use a bioptic telescope when driving, using it only to look at the traffic lights whether in Texas or in Taiwan. Driving in Texas's superhighway especially in a big city like Houston and Dallas is more challenging than in Taiwan. On the contrary, I have to drive more carefully in Taiwan's local streets than I do in Texas due to Taiwan's jammed traffic. However, driving in Austin of Texas for me means more often to wear and use a BiOptic telescope to make sure a red light or a green light than in Taiwan as a lot of time I am the first car in the street corner to have to decide whether to go or to stop. Another concern for me to drive in Texas than in Taiwan is driving westward at sunset. So far, no special sunglasses have been prescribed for me to cover a bioptic telescope and other portion of lens.

Due to optic nerve atrophy at the age of 16, I have had rich experiences in riding

a bicycle and a motorcycle. Such experiences certainly help build the fundamental abilities to drive an automobile. Maybe it is part of the reasons that I receive no formal BiOptic driving training (only from a friend) and still use a BiOptic telescope quite well. Without question, I found a BiOptic telescope very helpful for several driving tasks.

In my observation, currently there are three low vision persons driving with or without a BiOptic telescope in Taiwan. However, more than fifty low vision persons can safely ride their motorcycles without the authorization of our government's driver license. It is obvious that low vision persons in Taiwan first take some actions to push the government to allow the low vision to ride a motorcycle (more acceptable by the general public). And a successful result will be expectable. Above all, the author's Texas and Taiwan's driving experience certainly will be discussed.