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The Pendulum of Education Reform: civic and moral education in Taiwan

Angela Chi-Ming Lee

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I. Educational reforms and their context in contemporary Taiwan

Educational reforms are like a pendulum: usually swung back and forth, influenced by socio-cultural context. A number of Taiwanese educational reforms have been accompanied by new social movements, e.g., minority rights, gender equality, environmental justice, labor rights, and land justice, beginning in 1987, martial law was abolished. In addition, there was a milestone in history in the presidential election sparking the first-time “party alternation” in 2000 for the opposition political party, Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), to end a 50-year single party governance by the Chinese Nationalist Party, Kuomintang (KMT) in Taiwan. The KMT, led by Chiang Kai-shek and his successors, moved from mainland China in the late of 1940s, and enacted authoritarian rule as well as education for more than several decades. Therefore, democratization, pluralism and liberalization after the 1990s have hence sought for in every socio-cultural sphere in Taiwan as well as educational reforms to meet the demands of the changing social reality (Yang, 2001)ⁱ.

The DPP served as the ruling party for 8 years but lost their political power in the 2008 presidential election. The KMT regained political power and oriented to build close connections with the Peoples’ Republic of China (PRC). Therefore, the so-called “Sunflower Movement”ⁱⁱ, a large anti-China demonstration, happened in March 2014. It was a college student-led protestⁱⁱⁱ which occupied the law-making body of the Legislative Yuan for 24 days to block the hurried approval of a controversial trade deal between Taiwan and China, and to force the government to agree to a new law allowing more public oversight of negotiations with Beijing. Broadly speaking, this was not only a student movement, but also social education for civil society to inspire Taiwanese people. Consequently, senior-high school students led another social movement against the Ministry of Education’s controversial adjustments to high-school curriculum guidelines (i.e., History, Civics and Society) from May to August, 2015.

Comparatively, the policies of KMT are more traditional and conservative, while the DPP’s are more modern and liberal. Due to Taiwanese educational reforms and their social context having been a vacillating spectrum, civic and moral education was greatly influenced and reflected upon the interchangeable traces.

II. The brief history of civic and moral/character education in Taiwan

In the past six decades of contemporary Taiwan, civic and moral/character education can be divided into the authoritarian (1949-1980s), transitional (1980s-2003) and current periods (2004-untill now). I’d like to briefly describe the characteristics for each period as follows.

II.1 civic and moral education as a means of political ideologies in an authoritarian period

From 1949 to the 1980s, during an authoritarian governed period the ultimate goal of Taiwanese educational system was to fulfill and reinforce the ideals, enumerated by Dr. Sun Yat-Sen, and stated in the “Three Principles of the People”: Nationalism, Democracy and Social well-being. Education was seen as a means of indoctrinating political ideology and Chinese traditional culture into the populace. As a result, civic and moral education consisted of ideological, nationalistic, political education and the teaching of a strict code of conduct (Lee, 2004).^{iv}

The goal of civic and moral education was to educate students to conform rather than to be autonomous. The government set up formal civic and moral curricula, which were regularly scheduled subjects, at every level: for instance, “*Life and Ethics*” and “*Social Studies*” in elementary schools (aged 7-12), “*Civics and Morality*” in junior high schools (aged 13-15), “*Civics*” and “*Three*

Principles of the People” in high schools (aged 16-18) and *“The Thought of Dr. Sun Yat-Sen”* in colleges and universities. Besides, the Taiwanese Ministry of Education (TMOE) stressed *“Youth Regulations”* and eight cardinal virtues. The former comprises 12 items, for example, *“Article 1: Loyalty and bravery are the bases of patriotism.”* The latter mostly originates from traditional Confucian thinking and contains loyalty to ruler or nation, filial piety, benevolence, love, trustworthiness, justice, harmony and peace (Lee, 2004).^v

II.2 civic and moral education lost its identity in a transitional period

From 1980s to 2004, Taiwanese educational reform has been regarded as one of the social movements and introduced to meet the needs of a greatly changing and emerging democratic society, as well as to make more manifest the intrinsic value of education. Political ideologies and traditional culture in civic and moral education were gradually phased out. The educational goals of civic and moral education tended to focus on students’ interest and individuality. In particular, the increasing rate of juvenile crime, behavioral deviation, smoking, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, school drop outs and a rising suicide rate made clear the significance of a need for a new civic and moral educational policy in Taiwan’s newly emancipated society to address these issues (Lee, 2004).^{vi}

However, *“moral and character education”* ironically became a symbol of outdated ideology during the 1990s, which pervaded an atmosphere of *“value-free”* and *“cultural relativism”*. Coincidentally, the TMOE promulgated *“The guidelines for a nine-year joint curricula plan of elementary and junior high schools”* in 1998 and had it fully implemented by August 2004. This educational reform made transformations by a wide margin from *“knowledge-based”* to *“competency-based”* curricula and integrated certain subjects into study areas. Unexpectedly, this educational policy separated civic and moral education at the secondary-educational level, and moreover there is no longer a specific moral or character education subject in Taiwanese elementary and secondary schools.

II.3 civic and moral education set apart and have differing curriculum styles in current period

Beginning in 2004, civic and moral education has become totally detached: civic curriculum has transformed to one course of *“Social Studies”*, while moral curriculum (ideally) *“should be blended”* into all learning areas/subjects. Actually, there was no longer an explicit moral education course in Taiwan’s school systems. In response to concerns expressed by Taiwanese academics, school faculty, parents and leaders of social organizations, the TMOE released a *“Moral and Character Education Improvement Program”* (MCEIP) (2004-2009 five-year program) in late 2004 and amended in 2006. This program offered guidelines for implementing moral and character education in primary and secondary schools, as well as postsecondary education. The program’s main goals were^{vii}:

to facilitate the development of students’ moral thinking and their ability to select, reflect on, cherish and identify with core ethical values and codes of conduct; to develop a character-based school culture in Taiwanese schools, one involving teachers, students, administrators, parents and community leaders; to strengthen the roles parents and community leaders play in schools’ moral and character education; and to give non-political organizations, cultural and educational foundations, as well as the mass media, a larger role in schools’ moral and character education.

In addition, the program's main principles to implement moral and character education (Taiwan Ministry of Education, 2004)^{viii} were: quality improvement through creative integration of traditional and modern values; core ethical values democratically decided; cooperative participation between school teachers, parents and social organizations; moral and character education with multi-channels of formal, informal and hidden curriculum; and encouraging schools to share the experience of implementation and effectiveness of moral and character education with others. Furthermore, the TMOE proclaimed the second five-year program from 2009 to 2013 of MCEIP and refreshed several policies for promoting the quality and sustainability of moral and character education in 2009. Particularly, the program listed the six "E"s (Example, Explanation, Exhortation, Environment, Experience and Expectation) as strategies of moral and character education and ten dimensions, which covered characteristics of school, administrative leadership, teacher professionalism, resources integration, formal curriculum, informal curriculum, hidden curriculum, student progress, school atmosphere and sustainable development, as evaluation indicators of moral and character education.

Furthermore, civic education from primary to secondary education becomes one of the learning area/subject entitled "Social Studies", including history, geography and civics. The title of the civic education are called "Social Studies" (elementary school), "Social Studies : Civics" (junior-high school) and "Civics and Society" (senior-high school). The main disciplines of civic education contain politics, economics, law, culture and sociology. Civic education stresses knowledge of social sciences and gradually loses its core moral values, particularly under the pressure of Taiwan's strict national entrance examinations.

Dramatically, the Taipei High Administrative Court in February 2015 ruled against the TMOE in a case involving the ministry's controversial "minor adjustments" to high-school curriculum guidelines, including "History" and "Civics and Society" in 2014 and requested the ministry "should make its information more transparent and complete for public perusal".^{ix} However, the TMOE insisted on implementing the adjusted curriculum guidelines and to review related textbooks to be published, although beginning in 2014 civic groups, high-school teachers and academics have called this adjustment "de-Taiwanization and Sinicization" of the education system tailored to the radical KMT's views of history and questioned the adjustment procedure lacked of legitimacy.^x Possibly due to the influence of the Sunflower Movement which happened in 2014, senior-high school students emphasized the same idea of civil disobedience and led another social movement, occupied the front court of the TMOE for several days, followed the aforementioned protest against the TMOE from May to August, 2015. Although the student movement did not succeed externally^{xi}, the protesters sparked an awareness among Taiwanese people and further the questioning of educational goals, content and its core values, e.g., what is Taiwanese national/cultural identity and how should we face our historical unjust events?

III. On-going educational policies and their issues related to civic and moral/character education

Since the "9-year compulsory education" was implemented in Taiwan in 1968, a "12-year basic education" has been developed by the KMT government and in 2010 the TMOE announced that its development was completed and ready to implement in 2014.^{xii} Actually, it is still an on-going educational reform because the 12-year national curriculum framework and all the learning areas/subjects have been under major revisions. Particularly after the Sunflower Movement in 2014 and anti-curriculum minor-adjustment movement in 2015, civic and moral curricula have been re-discussed. "The general guideline of 12-year national curriculum for basic education" (GGNC) was proclaimed by the TMOE in November 2014, and the detailed guidelines for individual learning areas/subjects will be hopefully completed by the beginning of the 2018

academic year.^{xiii} However, this educational reform has its uncertainty because the presidential election will be held in January 2016.

The general guideline of 12-year national curriculum(GGNC) stresses three central ideas of “spontaneity, interaction, and common good”: “spontaneity” refers to the importance of students’ self-learning and how schools improve students’ learning motives and enthusiasm; “interaction” points out where schools should enable students to develop their competencies to interact well with themselves, other people, society and the nature; “common good” indicates schools should assist students to experience the meaning of life, to devote themselves to society and to contribute to the sustainability of nature and culture.^{xiv} In addition, one of the educational goals is “to cultivate civic responsibility”, which includes democratic literacy, concepts of rule of laws, human rights, moral courage, community consciousness, national identity and global understanding.^{xv} Moreover, the GGNC states core literacies for human-based sustainable learners containing three dimensions and nine items. They cover dimensions of “autonomous action” with items of “mental and physical quality and self-improvement”, “systematical thinking and problem-solving” and “planned implementation and creative management”; dimension of “interactive communication” with items of “symbols usage and expression”, “ICT competency” and “aesthetic literacy”; and dimension of “social engagement” with items of “moral practice and civic consciousness”, “human relations and teamwork cooperation” and “multicultural and global understanding”.^{xvi} In short, the current educational reform seems to reveal a comprehensive ideal of civic and moral education, but it is hard to be accomplished in reality and even if individual learning areas/subjects which are revising their curriculum guidelines are difficult in corresponding to the ideal due to the disciplinary characteristics and structural complexity.

IV. Controversial issues and challenges for Taiwan’s civic and moral education

After exploring the contextualized history of Taiwan’s civic and moral education, I’d like to investigate its controversial issues. Firstly, the unresolved dilemma of whether to integrate civic and moral education and the feasible style for its curriculum organization. Secondly, the ideal trends for curriculum goals toward conservative or liberal directions for civic and moral education. Thirdly, beyond the myth of “value neutral” in civic and moral education into a profound rationale for curriculum content. Several recommendations are provided for Taiwan and other countries through these reflections on the continuing history.

IV.1 crossing the boundary of curriculum and schools to integrate civic and moral education

To explore a suitable pattern for civic and moral curriculum is an age-old question regarding the civic and moral education field. Several Pacific-Asian countries, e.g., China, South Korea and Singapore, usually have timetabled subjects on civic and moral education, while the western countries, e.g., USA and UK, usually stress informal curriculum and school culture/ethos. Taiwan, as one of the Pacific-Asian countries, has experienced differing styles of curriculum organization for civic and moral education in the modern period. Facing the changes of 12-year basic education, several colleagues and I conducted a research project to implement a survey for teachers, parents and NGO representatives on moral/character education (Liu, Lee, Chen & Fan, 2015).^{xvii} One of the findings according to 525 respondents (multiple choices) showed that items of “*the mass media has negative influences on youngsters*” (65.9%) and “*parents prefer academic achievement to moral/character education*” (62.2%) are the top two difficulties to implement moral/character education.^{xviii} Another finding of the same study indicated that participants agreed with stand-alone moral/character education around 50%.^{xix} Consequently, the timetabled subject is important

for a systematic curriculum, but the feasible style for Taiwan's civic and moral curriculum organization is possibly across the boundary of formal curriculum. That is, informal curriculum, school atmosphere/culture/ethos as well as social education in broad meaning are suitable curriculum styles to integrate civic and moral education, which is similar to the "Just Community" approach constructed by Kohlberg, Power, Higgins-D'Alessandro and other colleagues beginning in the 1970s (Power et al., 1989)^{xx} and Lee's character-based school culture (CBSC) model (Lee, 2009)^{xxi}. For example, the concept of "civil disobedience" was discussed by the common people when the social movements happened in Taiwan in 2014 and 2015.^{xxii}

IV.2 critical thinking and multiple identities to balance conservative and liberal directions for civic and moral education

Conservative or liberal direction for civic and moral education seemed to be a dichotomy during the modern Taiwanese history; in particular they were influenced by the politics. Therefore, the main purposes of civic and moral education should stress critical thinking and multiple identities rather than being a route for brainwashing or indoctrination. Since there are more and more controversial and social issues, respondents in the aforementioned survey agreed certain critical issues: life ethics, gender equality, family ethics, basic human rights, ethnic equality, minority caring, social justice, professional ethics, technological ethics and environmental ethics, should be incorporated into civic and moral curriculum (Liu, et als., 2015).^{xxiii} Therefore, to be a critical thinker is more important than to choose a single conservative or liberal direction. Moreover, in a rapidly changing and high-tech world leading to a pattern of horizontal connection, open information, and decentralized collaboration, how to resolve the paradox of nationalism and globalization is also an unavoidable topic for Taiwanese people, especially because Taiwan has a complicated relation with China. Due to people living at the edges of more than one communal affiliation, bridging loyalties and identifications, people need to navigate the complexity of their multiple identities to "attain or maintain personal integration in the face of often-shifting experiences of personal or social location." (Josselson and Harway, 2012)^{xxiv} As a result, although there are continuing and conflicting issues within Taiwan's civic and moral education, it is valuable for educators and learners to create fluid and context-dependent identities in order to become both national and global citizens.

IV.3 beyond the myth of "value neutral" to strengthen value-based civic engagement for civic and moral education

Core ethical values infused into civic and moral education had a long history for several decades in Taiwan because of the Chinese Confucian tradition. While the modernization and democracy in Taiwanese society, so called "value neutral" to prevent from political indoctrination has become the mainstream for civic education curriculum, focusing only on knowledge of social sciences from primary to secondary education. However, civic and moral education should encompass completed dimensions of knowledge, values and skills/actions and values as the internal part. For example, the purpose of Australian "Civics and citizenship education" stress the importance of shared values^{xxv} :

To promote students' participation in Australia's democracy by equipping them with the knowledge, skills, values and dispositions of active and informed citizenship. It entails knowledge and understanding of Australia's democratic heritage and traditions, its political and legal institutions and the shared values of freedom, tolerance, respect, responsibility and inclusion.

In addition, a high-quality civic and moral education need to connect theory and practice to cultivate active and engaged citizens. The definition of civic engagement is^{xxvi} :

a morally and civically responsible individual recognizes himself or herself as a member of a larger social fabric and therefore considers social problems to be at least partly his or her own; such an individual is willing to see the moral and civic dimensions of issues, to make and justify informed moral and civic judgments, and to take action when appropriate.

Over the past 10 years, Taiwan's governmental and non-political/governmental organizations have promoted numerous "civic engagement" activities. In 2007 the TMOE proclaimed the "service-learning programs for higher education" and then has broadened to secondary education level in order to educate students possessing prosocial attitude, moral characters, civic participation skills, open-mindedness, and ability to service for others.^{xxvii} Additionally, more and more NPOs and NPOs in Taiwan have been devoted to civic engagement for young generations, e.g., Civic and Law-related Education Foundation (CLEF) has initiated the "Project Citizen" adopted and translated from the Center for Civic Education, USA beginning in 2007.^{xxviii} Therefore, Taiwan's civic and moral education should get beyond the myth of "value-neutral" and strengthen value-based civic engagement to reach a more justice-and-caring community locally, national and globally.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

In conclusion, I explored the contextualized history of Taiwan's civic and moral education and investigated three main controversial issues. Although educational reforms are like a pendulum influenced by socio-cultural context, several recommendations are provided for Taiwan and other countries through these reflections on the continuing history. They are : 1. Civic and moral education should not be separated but needs to be joined together and encompass comprehensive curriculum, including formal curriculum, informal activities, school-wide culture/atmosphere, community services and social issues in public. 2. Civic and moral education should not tend to the dichotomy of conservative or liberal direction but needs to improve students' critical thinking skills and multiple identities. 3. Civic and moral education should not lose core values but needs to strengthen justice-and-caring based civic engagement.

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^{iv} Lee, C.-M. (2004). Changes and Challenges for Moral Education in Taiwan. *Journal of Moral Education*, vol.33, No.4, pp.575-595.

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} MCEIP cited from <http://ce.naer.edu.tw/policy.php>

^{viii} National database of moral and character education, cited from <http://ce.naer.edu.tw/policy.php>

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- ^{xvi} Ibid.
- ^{xvii} Liu, S-M, Lee, C-M, Chen, Y-H, Fan, C-H (2015). Survey on Current Implementation of Character and Moral Education and Response to the Curriculum Reform of 12-Year Basic Education in Taiwan. *Journal of Research in Education Sciences*, 60(2), 79-109.doi:10.6209/JORIES.2015.60(2).03 (in Chinese)
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- ^{xix} Ibid.
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