

New history textbook fuels debate over biases

Written by Chu Ping-yi 許平義
Monday, 12 May 2014 10:56

The government's brutal "minor adjustments" of curriculum guidelines for senior-high school history courses at the beginning of this year have now been followed by a new history textbook published by Shi Ji Cultural Co, which has added fuel to the fire and caused further controversy over history education in Taiwan.

The Ministry of Education, saying it respects "freedom of speech," has done nothing and will not punish the publisher for the textbook, which states that the Taiwan independence movement is likely to plunge society into chaos over national identity.

However, which democracy would state in its history textbooks the future direction that the country should not take? That should be decided by Taiwanese, not textbook writers. In addition, the textbook arrogantly and presumptuously criticizes political parties, without specifying their names. Regardless of whether the party being criticized is the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), the Democratic Progressive Party or any other party, the writers have crossed a line by acting like political fanatics.

So many academics and experts are working for the government. Why could they not see these problems in the textbook, which deviates from standard protocol for academic publications? Surely President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), Premier Jiang Yi-huah (江宜華) and Minister of Education Chiang Wei-ling (蔣偉寧) know how to write for an academic publication. How can it be that this textbook passed the ministry's review process? The government really owes us an explanation.

Furthermore, both the editor and the consultant to the publisher of this book serve as members of the ministry's review committee for the curriculum guidelines, so there has been no attempt to avoid conflicts of interest.

Profits from textbook sales are limited, and most come from selling related products, such as teachers' manuals, reference books, as well as discs with databases for practice questions and answers. Since they have appointed the publisher's editor and consultant to sit on the review committee, the ministry should also take some responsibility for the controversy.

New history textbook fuels debate over biases

Written by Chu Ping-yi 許介显
Monday, 12 May 2014 10:56

Once during a visit to the Berlin State Library in Germany, I saw a Chinese translation of Adolf Hitler's autobiography, *Mein Kampf*. The last page of the book noted that the book is a "restricted item." Researchers must register in advance to browse the book, which is not available to the public.

Out of curiosity, I asked the librarians why a democratic country would choose to ban the book, and their answer was clear and decisive: The German government does not want to repeat the mistakes that led to the Nazi era and it does not want hatred between different ethnic groups to extend to the next generation.

Germany's ban on Nazi discourse is not a restriction of freedom of speech, nor is it worried about people having diverse opinions. Rather, the government is worried that studying the Nazi version of history may lead to serious consequences — such as hatred between different ethnic groups and massacres.

The true meaning of history education is to have an open mind about one's own country and homeland and to write textbooks that honestly portray the past.

Textbooks should guide students on how to live with different ethnic groups and to respect differences. Unfortunately, Shi Ji's textbook is based on the "winner takes all" concept as it tries to brainwash students and stir up hatred. No matter how they went about compiling the book, that is a line that really never should have been crossed.

Chu Ping-yi is a research fellow at Academia Sinica's Institute of History and Philology.

Translated by Eddy Chang

Source: [Taipei Times - Editorials 2014/05/12](#)