

Curriculum changes for the colonial outpost

Written by Lee Min-yung 林敏雄

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The government's attempt to implement changes to high-school curriculum guidelines is an outrage based on a colonial mindset and the party-state's fear of losing power. At a time when their Republic of China (ROC) is no longer in China, the evolution of the national epistemology that has resulted from the party-state's constant reinterpretation of itself during the democratization process — going from the view that there is the ROC on Taiwan to the idea that the ROC is Taiwan — has in effect exposed the party-state's lies and revealed that the emperor is wearing no clothes. This revisionism is very conservative and stops short of making any real change, but these facts are something that the people who are defending the ROC party-state discourse in the hope that they will be able to perpetuate their control over Taiwan are unable to face up to.

This is why the government is using “minor adjustments” as an excuse to carry out random changes and is unwilling to change its outrageous policy. The education ministers under President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) — Cheng Jui-cheng (鄭俊英), Chiang Wei-ling (蔣偉寧) and Wu Se-hwa (吳思華) — have met with students, yet they have chosen not to side with regular, normal education, instead choosing a colonial mindset and party-state thinking. This choice has resulted in a series of protests by students: first against the cross-strait service trade agreement and now against the handling of the high-school curriculum changes. The party-state apparatus will succumb under the wave of rising student awareness, as educational authorities that have been commandeered by the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) are dealing with the students in a very different manner from how educators addressed student movements when the ROC was still in China.

During the Martial Law period, people were killed without mercy. Since the lifting of martial law and the democratization of the nation, people have been arrested without mercy. To demonstrate their dissatisfaction with Wu's handling of the situation, students climbed over the wall of the Ministry of Education compound and entered Wu's office. Police promptly arrested the students and reporters who followed them. What decade is the nation living in? Does the Ma regime think it still has unlimited powers bestowed by martial law?

Worst of all, these things have occurred in Taipei on Mayor Ko Wen-je's (柯文哲) watch. Ko was elected with the support of his so-called “white” force, which supposedly transcended affiliation with the pan-blue and pan-green camps, and it was hoped Ko would bring real reform to Taiwan's political system. However, Ko's response to the changes to the curriculum guidelines and his handling of the arrest of students and journalists by the police, have demonstrated that he is not running a progressive administration, leaving many disappointed.

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Prior to the defeat of the KMT by the Chinese Communist Party, the KMT treated young Chinese students in a similarly outrageous way, but, at the time, teachers strongly supported the students and showed great strength of character. In 1949, following momentous change in China, the KMT retreated to Taiwan. The party has yet to learn from its historic setback, instead choosing to walk in vain along a road that leads to nowhere, to the widespread indignation of Taiwanese. The democratization movement has provided a chance for Taiwan to shift toward localism — its participants and supporters of freedom now have an opportunity to build the nation together. Unfortunately, the KMT is obsessed with having lost China — in their hearts, Taiwan is nothing more than a colonial outpost.

Lee Min-yung is a poet.

Translated by Perry Svensson and Edward Jones

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