

## Forging a Taiwanese identity in our schools

Written by Lee Min-yung 李敏勇  
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President-elect Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) has named former minister of finance Lin Chuan (林錫山) as premier, and he is to be tasked with forming the Cabinet of the incoming Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) administration. The names of other Cabinet members are to be made public in due course. Many Taiwanese political observers have turned their attention to the likely candidates, demonstrating the high expectations the nation has of the new government.

Education authorities have been singled out by commentators for putting too much emphasis on developing business administrators and managers. It seems as if education is increasingly disconnected from society, or that business students are often inadequately prepared to enter the work place, and this is becoming a problem. Arguments have been put forward by both the humanities and sciences camps. However, in a society that places economic development ahead of culture, pragmatic arguments are often made light of.

Taiwan, under the Republic of China (ROC) system, has yet to free itself from the Chinese way of thinking. Education — in particular the development of civic awareness — is burdened with too much outmoded thinking which has forced a straight jacket onto learners.

Under the ROC system, civic awareness education is often caught in a trap of its own design. President Ma Ying-jeou's (馬英九) administration has attempted, through amendments to the humanities curriculum, to force each new generation to be educated in "Chinese." This has resulted in restrictive and unenlightened education. There is still much work that needs to be done to eliminate this problem.

At the end of the 20th century, many forward-looking countries orientated their national curricula to topics relevant to the new millennium. However, in Taiwan — held down by its Chinese one-party-state government — authorities sought to pull Taiwan back into China's fold and return the country to its past. If the winds of change are now blowing across Taiwan, this is purely down to the efforts of Taiwanese to pull their country back from the abyss, despite the government's best efforts to prevent them from doing so.

In the 21st century, Taiwan experienced eight years of a DPP administration under former president Chen Shui-bian (陳水扁) and a further eight years of Ma's Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) administration. The nation is on the cusp of a new era with a Tsai-led DPP

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administration. In the past 16 years Taiwan has gone through a period of progress followed by a counter-revolution. Now is the time for a shake-up of the nation's civic education in order to broaden the horizons of young Taiwanese.

Questions of individual identity, Taiwanese identity and what it means to be Taiwanese and a citizen of the world should all be explored in civic education. It should not be limited to a binary comparison of Taiwanese versus Chinese identity.

Individuals should be understood through their physical being and consciousness. Just as in society there is economics and there is culture, important horizons are developed through an individual's physical being and personal character. For Taiwanese, time (history) and space (geography) have provided them with a sense of place. In the eyes of the law, Taiwanese belong to Taiwan, and this creates a differentiation between being Taiwanese and being a citizen of the People's Republic of China. In this globalized world, Taiwanese are also world citizens with an international outlook and sense of understanding.

Civic education in Taiwan must place more importance on individual identity, Taiwanese identity and the place Taiwanese occupy as citizens of the world. There is much work to be done.

*Lee Min-yung is a poet.*

Translated by Edward Jones

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