

Military must leave students alone

Written by Lee Hsiao-feng 李筱峰

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Many people might find it hard to believe that my favorite class in high school was taught by a military instructor, whose name, Fu Chun (傅春), I still remember.

Fu was a graduate of Wuhan University and he was deeply knowledgeable about literature, history and philosophy. Unlike other military instructors, he seldom spouted anti-communist cliches. One time in class he gave a lengthy talk about British philosopher Bertrand Russell, which struck a chord with me as I happened to be a big fan of Russell at that time. That was all more than 40 years ago.

Yet regardless of how much I enjoyed Fu's class, for the past 40 years, I have fought to abolish this system, which requires students to take military training with military instructors, as I believe it is unreasonable.

My reasons for opposing the system have been deeply influenced by the liberal thinking of Russell and Taiwanese activist Yin Hai-kuang (殷海光), but even without delving too deeply into liberal philosophy, anyone with a bit of common sense and understanding of democracy would wonder why military personnel should be in charge of education in schools in a democratic nation.

Some argue that military instructors should be on campuses because many take care good care of students, but that argument is irrelevant, as it concerns individual behavior rather than the system.

Although there were some good court eunuchs in ancient China, that did not mean it was a good system worth keeping.

The original purpose of placing military instructors at schools was to establish a military training system which would enable thought control. One year after Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) and his regime fled to Taiwan, the government began researching and drafting military training plans for high schools and above, and in 1953, the Executive Yuan announced the Regulations for Implementing Military Training in High schools and Above (高中以上學校實施軍事訓練辦法).

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Under the act, military officers were sent to schools to serve as instructors at the military training office, in charge of issues related to student conduct. All school military training was directed by the China Youth Anti-Communist Nation Salvation Corps, then led by Chiang's son Chiang Ching-kuo (蔣經國).

The corps was founded in 1952 under the Ministry of National Defense's General Political Warfare Department, in accordance with Chiang Kai-shek's policy to fight communism and "retake the mainland." It was designed to "help young people build a good political understanding and prevent communist infiltration."

In 1960, the Ministry of Education established the Department of Students' Military Training, took over all issues related to student military training and tightened the rules. Under those rules, high-school students who fail military training class must retake the class and cannot advance the next grade; students that fail the class a second time can be expelled. Likewise, college and university students who have failed military training classes are not able to graduate. These rules show that so-called military training is in reality a system designed to control students by brainwashing and monitoring them.

I was born about the time when the China Youth Anti-Communist Nation Salvation Corps and the military instructor system came into being. In May 1973, while in my 20s as a student majoring in education at National Chengchi University and influenced by democratic thinking, I published an article entitled "The future of personality education" in issue No. 64 of the Intellectual, advocating "the separation of education and military affairs," specifically by making military personnel leave campuses.

My article had absolutely no impact, with the exception of me being given a "major demerit" by the school. In my junior year I published more articles related to the issue, which eventually led to my expulsion. That is what happens when thought control takes precedence over education.

Following the authoritarian rule of Chiang Kai-shek and his son, many people have questioned the necessity of having military instructors on campuses. Is a system of brainwashing the public really an effective way to achieve the goal to fight communism and help "restore the mainland"?

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The answer should be very clear after taking a look at the likes of Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) Chairwoman Hung Hsiu-chu (洪秀柱) and former president Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九), who have not only given up fighting communism, but continually fawn over the Chinese Communist Party.

It is quite apparent that the military instructor system has failed to fulfill its original purpose of promoting anti-communism and help “restore the mainland.” As Taiwan has become a democratic nation, it only makes sense that military instructors be retired from campuses.

Certain reactionaries within the KMT have defended the system, saying that today’s military instructors are no longer in charge of thought control and are essential for campus safety — which is simply illogical.

A military officer’s job is to protect the country against its enemies. Since when have they been relegated to merely handling campus security? If that is really their job, how are they any different from security guards?

Lee Hsiao-feng is a professor at the Graduate School of Taiwanese Culture at National Taipei University of Education.

Translated by Tu Yu-an

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