

Sinicization of textbooks panned

Written by Taiwan Tati Cultural & Educational Foundation
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Union of Taiwanese Teachers secretary-general Kuo Yen-lin, second right, Taiwan Association of University Professors vice president Shiu Wen-tang, third right, and others protest outside the Ministry of Education yesterday against a recent editorial in the Chinese-language United Daily News criticizing high school history textbooks for using the phrase “Japanese occupation period” when referring to the Japanese colonial era in Taiwan.

Photo: Chien Jung-feng, Taipei Times

Historians and civic groups yesterday warned about recent attempts to Sinicize the content of history textbooks in Taiwan, saying that if the Ministry of Education (MOE) compromises on the issue, students would be taught to adopt worldviews from the authoritarian era.

At separate press conferences, the groups and historians said several textbook publishers and media outlets’ call to change the term “Japan-governed period” to “Japanese occupation period” not only violates the current educational curriculum, approved in 2009, but also espouses a China-centric mindset.

“The usage of the terms ‘Japan-governed period’ and ‘Netherlands-governed period’ were agreed upon by Taiwanese historians and educators after years of debate and discussion. These are neutral terms that state nothing but the facts,” Chen Yi-shen (陳宜生), an associate researcher at the Institute of Modern History at Academia Sinica, told one of the press conferences.

The conference was organized by the Taiwan Association of University Professors and the Union of Taiwanese Teachers, and held in front of the ministry.

Taiwan was ceded to Japan by the Qing Empire in the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895, Chen

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said, adding that if Taiwan had instead been forcefully occupied by the Japanese, the Qing Dynasty would have taken military action to repossess the island.

Several pro-independence groups, including the Taiwan Society, the Northern Taiwan Society and the Hakka Society, said at a separate news conference that the ministry should stand its ground.

Controversies surrounding high-school history textbooks have been emerging periodically since President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) took office in 2008, when pan-blue politicians and pro-unification academics recommended revising the national curriculum approved by the previous Democratic Progressive Party administration.

The most recent controversy arose when textbooks written by three publishers were rejected by a ministry review committee in January because they went against the current curriculum.

The Chinese-language United Daily News and the China Times newspapers both brought up the issue last week in their editorial pages, saying that the term “Japan-governed period” was a misrepresentation of history.

The three publishers — Bei Yi Cultural, Shi Ji Cultural and Ke Yi Cultural — are owned by the same person: Cheng Chih-shen (鄭志盛), executive officer of the pro-unification Chinese Integration Association (CIA).

CIA chairman Chang Ya-chung (張炎仲), a National Taiwan University (NTU) professor, serves as an honorary consultant for the three companies.

Chang and Cheng have both denied that their political views had anything to do with the content of the textbooks.

Lee Hsiao-feng (李筱峰), a professor at NTU’s Graduate School of Taiwanese Culture, said the

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historical view adopted by the former Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) authoritarian regime in the past had created an erroneous perspective of history to present to Taiwanese.

Lee said he once asked students which country had bombed Taiwan during the latter part of World War II and found to his surprise that about 70 percent thought it had been Japan.

This misconception is the result of students' lack of awareness that Taiwan was Japanese territory at the time, Lee said, adding that his students had told him: "The history textbooks taught us that we fought the Japanese for eight years."

The civic groups and historians said ministry Secretary-General Wang Tsuo-tai (王雲五) was to blame for allowing this "falsification" of history.

Wang earlier this year said that Taiwan's history should be incorporated as part of China's history in the curriculum for high schools and recommended the review committee consider allowing both "the Japan-governed period" and "the Japanese occupation period" to be used in textbooks.

Pro-unification academics citing bloodline and culture as the reason Taiwan's history should be part of China's history "does not make sense at all," Lee said.

"Americans would never tell you that their history is part of British history because they share the same heritage. Singaporeans would never agree that their history is part of Chinese history because they come from the same ethnic group," he added.

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