

Academics slam curricula changes

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The proposal by the Ministry of Education that high-school curriculum guidelines should say that the right to self-determination of people under colonial rule is restricted is aimed at depriving Taiwanese of their right to determine the future of their own country, while downplaying the White Terror era is an attempt to legitimize authoritarian rule, academics said yesterday.

Amid strong criticism, the ministry announced the full versions of adjustments to be made to the history, civic and social studies, Chinese language and geography curricula on Monday night.

The adjustments published remain unchanged from those proposed earlier that had sparked great controversy.

Among the so-called “minor adjustments,” the attempt to define self-determination and the downplaying of the White Terror era under the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) regime are particularly politically contentious.

In the section of the civic and social studies curriculum on human rights, “self-determination,” which appears in the current curriculum as one of the examples of human rights issues commonly seen in the world, is rephrased as “self-determination of colonies.”

The reason given for the change is that “self-determination most of the time refers to colonies fighting for self-governance or independence... However, applying the notion to nations in general is controversial,” according to the new curriculum guidelines publicized on the ministry’s Web site.

The Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples adopted by the UN in 1960 is cited by the ministry as supporting evidence.

The ministry’s guidelines also refer to the 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action

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which “clearly states that the notion shall not be construed as authorizing or encouraging any action which would dismember or impair, totally or in part, the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent states.”

Academia Sinica associate research fellow Fort Liao (廖正興), upon hearing the rephrasing and the declarations cited, retorted with the examples of Scotland, Quebec and Kosovo.

Liao said the wording and the references cited by the ministry are intended to block Taiwan's independence and are the result of a particular political ideology.

While textbook revision always relies on a set of political views, he said, the adjusted wording harbors the intention of disguising its political outlook by cherry-picking.

“Why doesn't it mention the two international covenants [the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights]?” Liao asked. “Both covenants start with the article: ‘All peoples have the right of self-determination,’ and both covenants have been ratified by our government and already made legally binding in the nation.”

The explanation given is a misunderstanding at best and deliberately misleading at worst, Liao said.

The downplaying of the White Terror era in the adjusted civic and social studies and history curricula has also been criticized.

In the adjusted civic and social studies curriculum, “the White Terror, prisoners of conscience and Germany's Nazis,” used as examples in the current curriculum of why human rights have to be protected, are erased and replaced by “the persecution of people by a government's abuse of power” and “a colonial government's discrimination against colonized people.”

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The justification for the deletion is “to generalize and raise it to a higher level” and that “White Terror cases are fully discussed in history textbooks.”

Academics criticized the juxtaposition of “the White Terror era” and “anti-communist policies” as overlooking the case-by-case differences of the White Terror era victims and trying to legitimize the persecution of political dissidents during authoritarian rule as an anti-communist policy.

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