

Students rally against altered curricula

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High-school students protesting in Taipei yesterday against planned alterations to high-school curriculum guidelines hold banners and umbrellas bearing slogans outside the Ministry of Education's K-12 Education Administration.

Photo: Chien Jung-fong, Taipei Times

Hundreds of high-school students in Taipei yesterday protested against what they said was the Ministry of Education's "China-centric" alterations to curricula.

Protesters said their use of an image of a black umbrella looming over Taiwan signified the ministry's "opaque" and "arbitrary" manipulation of textbooks.

Protesters called for the ministry to abolish the curriculum guidelines set to be introduced at the beginning of next month.

If the ministry does not respond to their appeals by Friday, they would consider taking more "radical" measures, the demonstrators said.

They accused the government of manipulating the nation's history and attempting to inculcate a China-centric viewpoint among students by altering the content of students' history, geography and civic education textbooks.

The students called on the ministry to retain the 2009 curricula, saying that they focused on Taiwan and did not focus on China unnecessarily in the way the new editions do.

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Taoyuan High School Alliance spokesperson Ko Ning-yu (柯寧裕) said the ministry claims the new curriculum guidelines are designed according to constitutional statutes. However, social atmosphere, public sentiment and international politics have all changed drastically since the time the Constitution was promulgated, and people generally do not perceive China and Taiwan as having strong ties anymore, he said.

He said the ministry should not have approved outdated curricula.

“We have serious doubts over the credentials and professionalism of the curriculum review committee, whose members are assigned by the ministry,” he said.

Event co-convener Mu Yu-feng (穆宇峰), who recently graduated from National Hsinchu High School, accused the government of changing substantial portions of textbooks about the nation’s past and depriving young people’s right to learn about the nation.

Taiwan Association for Human Rights legal specialist Hsu Jen-shuo (許建碩) said his organization has been fighting a legal battle against the ministry’s failure to ensure transparency since the new curricula were announced in February last year.

Although the court ruled in favor of the association, the ministry has appealed and the case is now awaiting a ruling by the Supreme Administrative Court, he said.

He panned the ministry’s reticence on the content of the new curricula, saying that protesters had to piece together information they obtained from legislators and other sources to get an idea of the agency’s dealings.

“The mentality of the ministry is: ‘Just because we do not want to disclose information does not necessarily mean we have done anything wrong.’ They just refuse to reveal any information [on the curricula],” he said.

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He said that textbook publishers have allocated more space for China-related content, so that the materials they put out gain the ministry's approval.

The students later wrote down their opinions on the guideline changes on the back of an open letter to Minister of Education Wu Se-hwa (吳思華), which they threw across the ministry's gates.

The act was a plea to the minister to stop treating their appeals with indifference, they said.

Democratic Progressive Party Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) yesterday voiced support for the students' protest, calling it a "civic education lesson outside of the classroom."

She said she feels hopeful when she sees so many young Taiwanese out in the streets determined to learn for themselves and urged society not to judge them based on political prejudices.

"The curricula must be based on facts, and the creation of curricula should follow the guidelines of objectivity and professionalism. If the government does not change their mind, we will shoulder the responsibility next year," Tsai said on Facebook.

Additional reporting by Loa lok-sin

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