Human Rights Education in Taiwan: Current Situation and Future Challenges*

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he promotion and development of human rights education are both affected by the macro environment such as changes in international and domestic communities, and the efforts made by members of the academe and non-governmental human rights organizations. In Taiwan, the promotion of human rights education in the formal education system started only in the 1990s.

This article presents a brief report on the promotion, current status and prospects of human rights education in Taiwan, with a focus on school education. It also analyses the experiences, problems and dilemmas faced in recent years by those promoting human rights education, and explores possible development alternatives in the future.

Beginning of human rights education

In the past decades social and political forces including the *Free China* magazine in the 1950s and the Tang-wai (an independent political group) in the 1970s disseminated human rights concepts in their struggles for human rights protection and democratic politics against the one-party autocracy.

Mid-1980s saw the gradual weakening of the regime and the rise of social movements advocating rights for the weaker sectors of society. These movements led to the establishment of many non-governmental organizations (NGOs). For instance, people behind *Awakening*, a magazine fighting for women's rights, established a women's organization that now has a profound

influence. The Taiwan Association for Human Rights used to be an underground organization closely tied with opposition forces that strove to protect the human rights of political prisoners. It started aboveground activities and obtained legal status only when the Democratic Progress Party (DPP) won the elections in Taipei City in the 1990s.

Education reform came in the wake of criticism about the rigidity of the education system, leading to the gradual acceptance of demands for change. The '410' demonstrations in 1994 proposed a series of reform packages:

- 1. Adoption of "small class, small schools" policy
- 2. Increase in the number of senior high schools and universities
- Promotion of the modernization of education
- 4. Enactment of the basic law on education.

In response, the government established *The Commission on Education Reform*, which had the primary objective of suggesting ways of eliminating inappropriate control of the education system, and eliminating wrong concepts

and practices in order to protect the right to education and respect the leading role of the learners themselves in the education process.

The Commission issued four reports from April 1995 to November 1996. Proposal No. 4 (November 1996) summed up their recommendations compiled on the basis of the previous three reports.¹

The objective of this education reform campaign clearly supported the spirit of human rights, yet teaching human rights was not made the core of the reform. In the past few years, many reform measures and their implementation have been severely questioned, and their future was uncertain. Nevertheless, a number of positive initiatives have already made an impact on primary and junior secondary schools, making the schools more open and not so authoritarian.

The character of human rights education efforts differed from that of the education reform. The former was greatly influenced by the United Nations (UN) Decade for Human Rights Education with its focus on the notion of rights. Yet it should be recognized that the macro environment produced by the education reform was helpful to the promotion of human rights education.

Research on human rights education in schools

The first attempt to promote human rights education in schools was in the autumn of 1995, when this author and his colleagues² in the Department of Political Science at Soochow University started to offer human rights courses at the undergraduate and graduate levels. They focused specifically on the United Nations human rights protection system, and on human rights philosophy and ethics.³ Additionally, this author formed another research group⁴ and applied for funding to the National Science Council to develop teaching materials and training program for teachers. The proposed project had four

components—pre-school, primary, junior and senior secondary, and tertiary levels—for a three-year period.⁵

In 1996, 1,200 college students all over Taiwan were surveyed using random sampling from three groups of institutions: universities and colleges, teachers' colleges and specialized colleges. The survey focused on the students' opinion on various human rights issues, such as political views and gender equality, etc. The survey considered several variables such as family, social and economic background, age, gender, etc. Due to limited resource, only a part of the survey results has been completely analyzed, and one article on the survey published in the *Political Science Journal* of Soochow University.⁶

Prior to the university student survey, a survey of secondary students was undertaken in 1994. While its focus was on secondary students' smoking and drinking habits, human rights issues were included to explore the potential interrelationships between smoking and drinking and reactions from their parents, teachers and peer group, to ascertain if their privacy was respected or not. This survey, using random sampling, covered students from 100 schools (50 junior high schools, 14 high schools, 21 vocational schools, and 15 junior colleges). The responses from more than 10,000 student-respondents produced a number of interesting and meaningful conclusions. For instance, smoking and drinking in campus were not resented by fellow students, but admired as 'fashionable' behavior. This project started the cooperation between the Human Rights Education Foundation⁸ headed by Bo Yang, a famous writer, and Professor Chou Pesu of the Yang Ming Medical School (now Yang Ming University), and the Soochow University research team.

Professor Tang Mei-ying of the Taipei Municipal Teachers' College (now Taipei Municipal University of Education) was in charge of the junior secondary component, emphasizing teaching methodologies and the inter-

action between teachers and students. They used as references *Educating for Human Dignity: Learning About Rights and Responsibilities*⁹ as well as *Human Rights: An Activity File.*¹⁰ Adopting the gradual approach (teaching from simple to complicated ideas), Professor Tang and her students worked on compiling teaching materials.

The research method in the pre-school component used games, focusing on mutual respect and tolerance. The questions inquired into, for instance, were: Does the teacher favor clever students or students from rich families? Or, are students from poor families bullied by other students? Professor Lin Peirong supervised this project. Plenty of materials have been gathered through the years and a publication on the study is underway.

During the three-year period of the project, research groups from Soochow University, Yang Ming University and Taipei Municipal University of Education had monthly meetings and discussions. The junior secondary group met more frequently, on weekly or bi-weekly basis. Because of varying backgrounds and experiences, heated debates tended to center on Western versus Chinese values, with either side unwilling to compromise. Several questions were raised: Should human rights education be promoted? Are universal human rights values merely a product of Western culture? Assuming it is accepted, how would human rights education be implemented? This could be considered a grand "Asian Values" debate that lasted for three years.11 Nevertheless, this did not affect the friendship among the group members, and they became even more confident about the promotion of human rights education.

1998: starting point for human rights education

1998 was a busy year . It was the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Numerous activities were held by

various UN organizations, governmental and civil society organizations. The Ministry of Education adopted a policy in September 1998 to include human rights topics in school curriculum through its General Guidelines of Grade 1-9 Curriculum of Elementary and Junior High School Education. The program delegated the decision-making power to the schools in order to streamline the courses and cultivate the students' capabilities, replace the previous system and its rigid requirements with flexible principles. It divided teaching into eight learning areas and six topics. The former are: Languages, Health & Physical Education, Social, Arts & Human Science, Mathematics, Natural Science, Life Skills, and Integrated Activities. And the latter are human rights, gender equality, environment, information technologies, home economics, and career planning. The program was designed to improve the link between knowledge and real life, break the restrictions of each subject as well as encourage the autonomy of teachers' expertise, resulting in diversified and democratic courses.

A year later, in 1999, the Basic Law on Education was enacted and explicitly recognizes the right to education, stipulates that the objective of education is to promote respect for basic human rights, and emphasizes the principle of equal access to education. This law can be considered an achievement of education reform that reaffirms commitment to human rights education.

Subsidized by the Taipei Bureau of Education, Professor Tang held a Workshop on Human Rights Education in November 1997. Thirty teachers from primary schools and junior secondary schools attended the workshop, on voluntary basis or upon recommendation by their respective principals. From March to mid-June 1998 the workshop convened weekly (mostly on Friday afternoons) with topics covering the concepts and history of human rights, child rights, constitutional protection of human rights, and planning and revision of teaching materials. The planning and revision ses-

sions stressed the consolidation of theory and reality, and tried to determine what human rights issues were suitable for teaching purposes. In July and August 1998, an advanced summer workshop was given to human rights teachers, with 15 participants from primary schools and junior secondary schools. They were divided into four teams, gathering each Friday morning. One team specialized on translating certain UN documents and foreign textbooks into simple and easily understandable form for teaching purposes. The other three teams revised the teaching materials compiled from March to June 1998. 13

In the summer of 1998, the Yang Ming University Crusades officially organized an "Education Camp for Junior Secondary School Students" that brought human rights concepts into remote towns and villages through small group activities focused on smoking, drinking, chewing betel and taking drugs. The Yang Ming Crusade was established by Professor Chou Pesu in the 1970s. The Crusade initially promoted public hygiene, but now it takes up human rights education.

In November 1998, an international conference was organized by colleagues at Soochow University, Yang Ming University and the Taipei Municipal University of Education with the participation of experts and scholars from the US, Europe and the Asia-Pacific Human Rights Information Center in Osaka, Japan. Simultaneously, a "Workshop for Teachers of Junior Secondary Schools and Primary Schools" was held in Taipei Municipal University of Education with over 100 teachers from primary and junior secondary schools Also, an exhibition of posters was held at Soochow University.

Human rights education in tertiary education took a big step in the establishment of the Chang Fo-Chuan Center for the Study of Human Rights at Soochow University in December 2000.¹⁴ The Center organized a number of conferences in recent years including the "International Conference on National

Human Rights Commissions" in January 2001¹⁵ and, jointly with the French Institute in Taipei, the "Literature and Political Engagement: A Seminar in Memory of the 100th Anniversary of Hugo". 16 The Center also invited a number of renowned foreign experts who contributed to the development of human rights education in Taiwan.¹⁷ In the area of peace studies, it held two seminars jointly with the Taiwan Peacetime Foundation in an effort to further research on topics related to peace.¹⁸ On the basis of such efforts, experts and scholars from dozens of universities and NGOs were invited to form an "Educational Consortium for Human Rights, Peace and Development" in an effort to encourage teaching in these fields.

In September 2002, the Center held a Seminar on Human Rights Education & Teaching with professors from various local universities that had offered courses related to human rights, peace and development presenting their curriculums.¹⁹

The government and human rights education

The change of government in May 2000 saw a stride in human rights education with close interactions between the academe, NGOs and government. The new government showed much interest in human rights through a number of initiatives.

In order to promote human rights education, the Ministry of Education convened the Committee for the Promotion of Human Rights Education that further clarified the notions of human rights education. Prior to this, the Ministry gathered representatives of the academe and NGOs in a joint effort to study the relevant issues regarding the promotion of human rights education, and established an internal coordination forum and division of labor among its departments and bureaus. During the first session of the Committee in April 2001, it adopted the *Implementation Plan for the Human Rights Education*, *Main Points*

for the Establishment of the Committee for Human Rights Education and Main Points of Subsidizing NGOs in Human Rights Education Activities.²⁰ The objectives of the Committee for Human Rights Education linked with the thrust advocated by the academics and NGOs and were de facto the essence of the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education.

A meeting in October 2001 convened by the Committee for Human Rights Education resulted in the formation of four Sections (Research, Development and Evaluation, Teacher Training and Curriculum Planning, Social Promotion and Publicity, and Campus Environment). Each group undertook a number of activities, including the following:

- 1. The Research, Development and Evaluation Section commissioned a study to Professor Feng Chao-lin of the National Cheng-chi University on "Guidelines for Evaluation in Each School Level," and another study by Professor Lin Chia-fan of the National Taiwan Normal University on "Campus Regulations vs. Students' Rights and Responsibilities: Perspective from a Study of Legal Cases in the US and Taiwan."
- 2. The Teachers' Training and Curriculum Planning Section held workshops for teachers from primary and junior secondary schools in different cities and counties.
- 3. The Social Promotion and Publicity Section held 'Human Rights Wedding' activities²¹ in different communities, commissioned the making of *Taiwan's Human Rights Journey*, a series of documentaries, and sponsored seminars in local community colleges with topics such as: What are human rights? The rights of women, children, senior citizens, laborers, indigenous peoples, homosexuals, environmental rights. The rights to medical care and health, and the human rights of mentally ill, etc.
- 4. The Campus Environment Section planned for physical barrier-free campus and complaint procedures, etc.

The Committee for Human Rights Education, the Committee for Gender Equality Education and the Committee for Life Education tried to link their respective programs and benefit from the resulting synergy. They tried to strengthen communication between them and identify the core values for educating the students in the 21st Century. They had joint meetings in December 2002 and February and June 2003 in addition to regular meetings of subgroups.²² Yet months of efforts did not yield any substantive result. While there is indeed a need to integrate human rights education, education for gender equality and life education, it was more difficult to achieve than we had imagined. The consolidation of several committees from various fields apparently requires further discussion and could not be achieved in a short period of time.

Through the years, the Ministry of Education has been subsidizing the training of senior secondary school principals and teachers, etc. via its Office in Taichung, which still administered the school system after the abolition of the provincial government.

The Ministry of Education also funds NGOs. Every NGO is entitled to apply for subsidy in their human rights education activities. For instance, the Taiwan Association for Human Rights received support for two Study Camps on Human Rights for University Students in the years of 2002 and 2003. The Chinese Association for Human Rights received support for its annual Winter Camp for Indigenous Culture and the publication of its annual *Taiwan Human Rights Index*, among others.

As early as 2001, the Committee for Human Rights Education had planned to set up human rights resource centers in the northern, central and southern parts of Taiwan respectively, but budgetary constraints prevented their establishment. The Ministry of Education, however, provided funding for the Chang Fo-Chuan Center for the Study of Human Rights to set up a Human Rights Education Advisory and Resources Center. Inaugurated

in November 2005 the new Center aims to consolidate human rights education resources, set up databanks, and provide information and consultation services to various education authorities in counties and townships as well as schools of various levels.²³.

Finally it is worth mentioning the active support provided by NGOs to human rights education in a broad sense. The Human Rights Education Foundation, for example, led the construction of a Human Rights Monument on the Green Island in 1998 after many years of preparation. The foundation's Chairperson, Bo Yang, who was jailed for 9 years and 26 days on the Green Island, said in his speech during the inauguration of the monument:

The five decades of white terror had passed. Looking into the future, we hope for an era when mothers will no longer weep [for their children and loved ones jailed in the Green Island]...Only an honest attitude towards historical mistakes will ensure a future and avoid any recurrence of evil. The Monument testifies to the world, that we the people have the capabilities and wisdom to terminate political persecution, continue to monitor the government, implement democracy and promote human rights education.²⁴

A teachers experience

The impact of the basic and advanced human rights education workshops can be seen in the experience of a primary school teacher who participated in these workshops. In 1998 Ms. Wang Shiou-Jing wrote a human rights education textbook. She invited seven colleagues in her school to test the textbook, which is designed to induce students to discover and discuss human rights concepts through reading exercises and natural life experiences. Through story-telling, the textbook introduces the interrelation between rights and responsibilities, and presents infringement of human rights in context for discussion. In this way the students may grieve at the loss of family members as told in the story and feel the need to do

something on human rights. She wanted to construct a respectful and democratic classroom by allowing the pupils' freedom of expression. Students are allowed to speak spontaneously while she is careful about her comments on them. Discussion among the students was encouraged during class to help them select learning objectives and present their learning content, by which they learn directly to be responsible to themselves. Students are allowed to rely on their own learning progress, without interrupting their on-going activities. They are encouraged to find human rights topics in their social studies textbooks, such as 'social order', 'civic responsibilities', and 'freedoms', etc. to determine the core value of human rights. Multi-class groups were also organized to visit the Taipei Municipal Parliament on a field study to understand how adults protect rights through their representatives, and how public problems are solved through democratic procedures.25

Prospects of human rights education

The initial achievements on human rights education in Taiwan require enhancement and deepening, but there are problems that would prevent this from happening:

1) Weakening government commitment

Interest on human rights within the government has decreased with the failure to enact laws on human rights norms and institutions, such as a National Human Rights Commission. Conflict among political parties in the Executive Yuan has taken precedence over these legislative proposals. At the same time, the executive branch of the government itself has also given less attention to human rights policies and education in view of the problems it has been facing.

2) Bureaucratic structure and operation of the Ministry of Education

Government bureaucracy tends to be conservative and lacks transparency. In the Ministry of Education, power and responsibility for different areas, such as primary school education, secondary school education, etc are allocated to various departments and units. The Committee for Human Rights Education could not compel the different departments and units to coordinate their actions. This required the intervention of the Minister or other higher officials. As a result, the Committee was not as effective as it could have been, and proposals that do not fall within the budget plan of the departments and units had difficulty securing financial support.

3) Indifference among educational authorities at county and township levels

Most of the educational authorities at the county and township levels are indifferent to human rights education and thus not willing to be involved. With the many tasks facing the schools and local officials, not to speak of conventional thinking on education, human rights education is considered an additional burden.

During the various study camps for teachers and principals of junior and senior secondary schools, a number of principals turned out to have misunderstood human rights education and thus opposed it. They thought that the promotion of human rights would lessen their power over the schools. The teachers were nervous because they thought that human rights would lead to ineffective management of students. Many urgent school issues came up during the discussions, including the inappropriate actions of teachers in punishing students, searching their bags, and restricting hairstyles, etc. But the reality is that the authority of the principals and teachers will be limited in the future and thus their system of management has to change too. The school campuses are increasingly getting diverse, and decisionmaking process has to incorporate the opinions of parents, teachers' unions and students.

These changes will affect the success or failure of human rights education. The Ministry of Education and the educational authorities of various counties and towns should fulfill their respective responsibilities of supervising and penalizing administrative staff, principals or teachers who violate the laws or regulations. This is the only way to correct the bad habits formed over the years.

The broader social horizon is not so bright either. Certain professionals including judges, lawyers and members of the police have little understanding of human rights. The general public, especially those in rural areas and remote districts, are still influenced by traditional attitude towards rights and suspicious of human rights education. This reality is a hindrance towards the enhancement of human rights and highlights the importance of human rights education. Reforming conventional values and customs is not easy, as it relates to both educational opportunity and real life experiences. Judging from this perspective, human rights education should move parallel with reform of the legal system. The general public will lose its faith on the legal system should there be no further improvement in it. They would resort to their conventional interpersonal relationship network instead of using the courts. In this case, neither the rule of law nor the protection of human rights would exist.

4) Lack of resources

The Ministry of Education in recent years has provided financial support to some extent to human rights education. But this support is not sufficient to satisfy the actual needs. The upgrading of facilities to promote human rights education within the schools, the establishment and continued operation of human rights education databank, the development of new and more effective teacher training programs (including accelerated training for core teachers from primary and junior secondary schools), and the provision of support for properly se-

lected good teachers to take advanced human rights courses or for student-teachers to take human rights course in selected colleges would all require more funds than currently available.

At the same time, tertiary education needs strengthening too. While human rights education in other countries has the support of their law schools, domestic law schools are not so interested in it. The development of theory and practice of human rights education will not take place unless the situation is changed.

Conclusion

Human rights education advocacy in Taiwan has its roots in the academe and NGOs, though the government provided some assistance. With the change of the ruling party in the government in 2000, the Ministry of Education took central role in human rights education promotion. Looking back on so many years of experience, government support in terms of policy and financial subsidies are essential conditions for human rights education. And this will be so for many years to come. Meanwhile, mutual respect among government, NGOs and academe should be strengthened. Since government policies have political considerations while the academe and NGOs are committed to their respective independence, conflicts or tensions among them are to be expected. They can serve creative purposes.

Endnotes

- * This is a shorter version of the paper prepared by the author for the "International Conference on Human Rights Education in a Diverse and Changing Asia" held in Soochow University, Taipei, Taiwan on 22-24 May 2006 and organized by the International Human Rights Education Consortium (IHREC) and the Chang Fo-Chuan Center for the Study of Human Rights. The original in Chinese language was translated into English by Douglas Li of the Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor courtesy of the Buraku Liberation and Human Rights Research Institute (Osaka, Japan).
- ¹ On the Report of the Commission on Education Reforms of Executive Yuan see www.sinica.edu.tw/info/

edu-reform.

- ² The colleagues are: Professor Hawang Shiow-Duan, Lecturer Chen Jui-Chung, Lecturer Chen Chun-Hung, and Lecturer Chen Mei-Hua.
- ³ The author gave the course on International Human Rights Protection in 1992 and 1993. Before that, the author taught courses related to human rights in the New York State University since 1976. Please refer to *Peace and World Order Studies: A Curriculum Guide*, compiled by Transnational Academic Program Institute for World Order (New York, 1978), pages 182-184.
- ⁴ The research group included the author, Professor Chou Pesu and Professor Huang Song-li of the Department of Public Sanitation of Yang Ming University, Professor Yu Bo-Chiun of the Academia Sinica, Professor Wu Yingchang of the Department of Psychology of National Taiwan University and Professors Tang Meiying, Dan Jauwei, Hsin Man-ling and Lin Pei-rong of the Taipei Municipal University of Education.
- ⁵ Among the four components, the tertiary component was subsidized for only one year. The following year's proposal invited six experts on various fields such as environment, sexuality, etc. to compose articles as appendices to the human rights textbook. Two reviewers at the National Science Council rejected the proposal. They were of the opinion that teaching the 'Constitution' at the university level already contains human rights education materials. A revised application was also disapproved. No such application was made in the third year, yet the research work continued.
- ⁶ Hawang Shiow-Duan, 'An Analysis on the Political Attitude of University Students in Taiwan', the *Soochow Journal of Political Science*, 9, September 1998, pages 171-202.
- ⁷ An analysis on this survey was published in the *Chinese Journal of Public Health* (1998; 17 (4) 303-316), while an edited version was published in this publication, see http://www.hurights.or.jp/hreas/3/15pesus_chou.htm.
- ⁸ The Human Rights Education Foundation was established by Mr. Bo Yang, a famous writer and historian in Taiwan.
- ⁹ Betty Reardon, Educating for Human Dignity: Learning About Rights and Responsibilities (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995). Professor Tang Meiying and her students translated several chapters of this book as reference material in 1998. Professor Fong Chao-lin of Chengchi University and his students translated the entire book, (Taipei: Advanced Education Publishing Company, 2002).
- ¹⁰ Graham Pike and David Selby, *Human Rights: An Activity File* (London: Mary Glasgow, 1988), translated into Chinese by Yu Bochuan, Siao A-chi (Taipei:

Yuan-Liou Publishing, 1998).

¹¹ See Chou Pesu, "Human Rights Education Implementation in Schools," in *Green Island Human Rights Monument* (Taipei: Human Rights Education Foundation Press, 2001).

¹² See Attachment One, Taipei Municipal Workshop on Human Rights Courses and Textbook Development.

¹³ Mei Ying Tang, *Human Rights Education in Schools:* The Curriculum Development and Teachers Training Program in Taiwan, paper delivered at the "International Conference on National Human Rights Commissions: Promoting and Protecting Human Rights," 2001.

¹⁴ For the setting up of the Chang Fo-Chuan Center for the Study of Human Rights, see Hawang Shiow Duan, *A Center for the Study of Human Rights at Soochow University*, a paper delivered at the International Conference on National Human Rights Commissions: Promoting and Protecting Human Rights, Taipei, 2001.

¹⁵ See proceedings for the "International Conference on National Human Rights Commissions," January 2001.

¹⁶ Literature and Political Engagement, Hawang Shiow-Duan, editor (Taipei: Webber Publishers, 2004).

17 The experts include the Dr. Heinrich Klebes (former deputy Secretary General of European Parliament), Georg Ress, (section chief of the European Court of Human Rights), Professor Margaret Bedggood (former Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission of New Zealand), Peter Hosking (a human rights expert from New Zealand), Mr. Michelle Falardeau-Ramsay (former Chairperson of the Canadian Human Rights Commission, Professor Thomas Pogge (University of Columbia) and Professor Jacqueline Bhabha (Executive Director of the Center of Human Rights Study in Harvard University).

¹⁸ See the proceedings of the 1st conference on "Bringing Peace Studies to Taiwan," October 2001; and of the 2nd conference "A Dialogue between Peace Studies and Social Sciences" October 2002.

¹⁹ See the conference proceedings on "Human Rights Education & Teaching" by the Chang Fo-Chuan Center for the Study of Human Rights, September 2002.

²⁰ For activities of the Commission for Human Rights Education, see *Spread the Seeds of Human Rights, Create an Environment of Human Rights Preservation.* 10 December 2001, pages 31-34.

²¹ "Human Rights Weddings" were originated by Bo Yang, who thought that if human rights were introduced in weddings, they would also be introduced to the family.

²² See the minutes of the 3rd joint conference of the conveners of the Committee for the Education of

Gender Equality, Committee for Promotion of Life Education and Committee for Human Rights Education, June 2003.

²³ See Handbook on Chang Fo-Chuan Center for the Study of Human Rights, Soochow University, December 2005.

²⁴ Bo Yang "We have the Wisdom and Capability to Practice Democracy" in *Green Island Human Rights Monument* (Taipei: Human Rights Education Foundation Press, 2001).

²⁵ Wang Shiou-jing, "The Exploration of Human Rights Education for Children: the Practice of Human Rights Education in Primary Schools" in *Notes on Human Rights Education*, No. 147, September 2001.

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