

Excerpt from "Going to School in East Asia"

Chapter 15 SCHOOLING IN TAIWAN

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF TAIWANESE EDUCATION

Prior to colonization by Japan, there were some forms of primary, secondary, and specialized schools for different purposes. Under the Japanese, a formal education system was established in 1919. Before then, the Japanese government issued the "Taiwanese Education Act" that divided the education system into four categories: general, vocational, specialized, and normal (teacher) education. At the general education or primary level, there were public schools, upper general schools, and girls' high schools. All of these admitted children between the ages of 7 and 13. Students were to learn knowledge and skills for life and basic needs. Not until 1943, was six-year compulsory education implemented. By that time, the enrollment rate for primary school level in Taiwan was 71.3 percent versus 99.6 percent for Japanese children (among the highest in Asia). After World War II, when Taiwan was returned to China, an Act regarding compulsory primary education in Taiwan was issued in 1947. By 1968 compulsory education was extended to 9 years and by 1984, both the primary and secondary education enrollment rates had reached over 99 percent (Directorate- General of Budget, Accounting and

Statistics, Executive Yuan, ROC, 2005).

Taiwanese education has been very much influenced by Confucianism. According to Tu (1995, as cited in Zhou, 2000), East Asian societies continue to be very much influenced by Confucian values such as political authoritarianism, family system, examination systems, saving habits, local organization, and human networks (Tu, 1995, as cited in Zhou, 2000). Therefore, education has been regarded as a priority in Confucian culture. Study involves hard work, effort, persistence, cultivation, and rigidity, whereas game playing is considered idling. The learning attitude for most students was expected to be one of diligence coupled with hard work and effort (Zhou, 2000).

As a result, Chinese society in Taiwan, places an emphasis on credentialism and examination systems. The Imperial Examination in ancient China (694–1895), which lasted for more than 1,000 years, had three social functions: First, to diminish the effect of social and family origin on social mobility. Second, to enforce the social control of the ruling class, by selecting intellectuals for the governing class through public examinations. Although the Chinese Imperial Examination was abolished in 1905, Taiwan is still under the influence of this examination tradition. As a result, these examinations are expected to be fair and allow social upward mobility.

A cooperative research project involving Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and China (Zhou, 2000) found schools in the Pacific rim to have a common high regard for credentialism. Parents value their Children's academic performance highly and are actively involved in school affairs. The school curriculum is highly geared toward school examinations. School accountability is usually judged by examination performance. Consequently, most secondary schools provide examination preparation programs for children after school. There is a common belief that students with better academic achievements will enjoy higher incomes.

The following paragraphs discuss three major educational issues in modern Taiwan education. They are: globalization versus localization, gender stereotyping, and equity of educational opportunity.

Globalization versus Localization

Education system in Taiwan, similar to other education systems in East Asia, has undergone an enormous transformation over the last two decades. Education has become interconnected with trends of globalization and internationalization, development of information communications technology, and a set of political, sociological, economic, and management changes. These changes together produce multifaceted influences on education in Taiwan. In particular, the ideology of globalization and localization acts as one of the driving policy agenda in Taiwan.

The notion of globalization encompasses a plethora of meanings. According to Mok and Lee (2000: 362), globalization is “the processes that are not only confined to an ever growing interconnectedness and interdependency among different countries in the economic sphere but also to tighter interactions and interconnections in social, political and cultural realms.” Governments in Taiwan have endeavored to follow the trend of globalization, especially in education.

In the efforts of Taiwanese educational globalization, English instruction was very much emphasized throughout primary and secondary education. In earlier history of education in Taiwan, English was only instructed in secondary schools as one of the compulsory classes. However, as to follow the trend of globalization and to connect with the world internationally, Taiwanese government started to push second language instruction into primary schools, targeting fifth and sixth graders in the elementary level in 2001, in order to cultivate their youth to become internationally competitive.

Another significant measure under the influence of globalization is the nine-year spiral curriculum reform in secondary education taken place in 2001. The objective of this curriculum reform program is considered the backbone of the major educational reform during the last decade. Its major goals are to promote cultural learning and international understanding as well as other demanding abilities for the 21st century. In order to achieve educational globalization, related issues and ideas were implemented within secondary curriculum in subjects such as civil and social studies.

Ministry of Education (MOE) also stressed globalization in higher education. Taiwan followed the world trend of higher education globalization, redirected the aim of education toward market-oriented. Lessening government control and integrating social demand with market

forces, Taiwanese education in the 1990s has been influenced by globalization to a great extent. Also, began in 2003, MOE started to promote a “World Class Research University” project, proposing to upgrade at least one of the universities in Taiwan be ranked among the top 100 leading international institutions of higher education within the next 10 years. Universities are required to establish a system of evaluation using methods as the SCI, SSCI, and the EI, or to be in accordance with the standards that meet international recognition for awards, achievements, and contributions within their field of expertise. In 2005, MOE granted NT\$50 billion (equals US\$1.56 billion) to 12 universities in the following five years to empower their research capacity to reach the world class level.

On the other hand, Taiwan has also strived for localization along with the globalization trend since the 1990s. As Giddens (1994) yielded, globalization concerns localization. The two concepts can be viewed as two sides of the coin that jointly shape the identity of self and the nation. Besides globalization, Taiwan itself has confronted with the demand of education localization within the country. This can be dated back to 1945, when Taiwan was under Japanese ruling. Under Japanese administration (1895–1945), the purpose of Taiwanese education was to assimilate local people into Japanese culture. After the restoration of Taiwan to China in 1945, the urgent mission of the Taiwan authorities was to abolish the effect of Japanese colonialism on Taiwan by setting up a new education system for the advancement of Chinese national identity (Yang, 2001: 204). There was a process of Chinese-oriented education which emphasized education for preserving Chinese culture and the national language, Mandarin. The American “six-three-three-four” system was adopted in Taiwan after World War II. Therefore, in the latter half of the 20th century, Taiwanese education went through a series of nationalism campaigns that drew heavily on Chinese culture and economic rationalism striving for western efficiency and effectiveness.

After 1949, the priority was to strengthen Chinese identity as means of eventually reasserting sovereignty for China over Taiwan. During that period of time, indigenous Taiwanese cultures and languages were banned especially after the “228(February 28th) incident” in 1947 which involved violent suppression by KMT troops of the Taiwanese people.

Since the late 1980s, Taiwanese society has gone through a period of

localization involving the renovation of Chinese identity with Taiwanese heritage and tradition. These trends of indigenization or so-called localization stem from historical complaints against KMT authoritarianism.

During the political transition period of the 1990s, the former president Lee Teng Hui tried to incite a Taiwanese independence movement against China. Since then, education has focused extensively on local issues and Taiwanese identity such as the declaration of calls for the country to be known as Taiwan rather than the Republic of China, the shift of textbook content in elementary and secondary schools from China to Taiwan issues, and the increasing proportion of Taiwanization of the national civil service examination questions.

However, under the above multiple political, social, and cultural influences in education, less attention was drawn to some of the risks and conflicts encompassing with globalization and localization in education. In the case of the language policy in the education system of Taiwan, there has been increasing concern over the falling of Taiwanese primary students' achievements in the Chinese subject area and Mandarin literacy (Central Daily News, May 5, 2005). The number of teaching hours that used to be allocated to the Chinese curriculum has been reduced from one-half to one-third across primary and secondary school sectors. Also, localization within Taiwan is a unique and great predicament. Different from the rise of localization of third world countries around the globe, which are mostly against western oppression. Taiwan is confronting a cultural identity problem (Taiwanese versus Chinese) that could split the country into two. At present, it is most important to participate in process of globalization and internationalization, and at the same time reduce the cultural identity conflicts to its lowest possibility in education as well as in other societal aspects.

Gender Stereotyping

Gender stereotyping is nothing new in Taiwan where the culture and society has placed priority of males over females. In the past, women used to be regarded as second class. Families have traditionally regarded boys as inheritors of the family name and property. Many married couples would try every method to have a son. Families typically invested

more resources on boys' education than on girls' education. Nevertheless, this traditional value system has been challenged and criticized by many women's rights advocates.

In the transformation from a traditional to a newly developed society, the Taiwanese government has passed several laws to promote gender equity. In 1997, the MOE in Taiwan initiated a Gender Equity Act which requires each primary and secondary school to conduct at least four hours of gender equity education each semester. It attempts to provide students with better opportunities for gender equity and to eliminate gender stereotyping against women (Tsai and Shavit, 2003).

In terms of educational achievement, the participation of women in Taiwan has increased at all levels of education over the past five decades. Specifically in higher education, Taiwan's female participation increased more than fourfold, from 11 percent in 1951 to 49 percent in 2005 (see Table 15.1).

Table 15.1
Percentage of female educational participation in Taiwan

Type of Education	Year	Percent
Primary education	1950	39
	1971	48
	1994	48
	2005	48
Secondary education	1950	28
	1971	40
	1994	47
	2005	48
Higher education	1951	11
	1971	37
	1994	43
	2005	49

Source: Chou and Chang, 1998: 354.

Equity of Educational Opportunity

Although Boudon (1974) indicated that the high degree of educational

development does not necessarily result in an equitable society after World War II, there is always a positive correlation between family background and educational opportunity. According to Blau and Duncan (1967), there is a positive correlation between family background and educational opportunity. In this regard, Taiwan has been considered one of the most equitable societies in terms of her income distribution and educational opportunity. Similar to other Western developed societies, educational opportunity in Taiwan has been correlated with family background and parental occupation.

The Taiwanese examination system from the 1950s to 2000 became one of the major avenues for upward mobility. Parents invested most of their savings in their children's educational activities such as going to cram schools or extra tutoring hours. According to Lin (2001), a major streaming exercise takes place between junior high and senior high school—one that divides students into different academic tracks based on their test results. Entry to different types of senior high schools will have a major impact on students' future careers (Lin, 2001).

In Taiwan, as in other East Asian societies, the higher the parental socioeconomic status, the higher the parental expectations for school success and the greater the family resources for supporting the education of their children (Zhang and Huang, 1997). Unlike in Western societies, where cultural capital seems to count more, in the Taiwanese context, family educational resources and going to cram school make a major difference in patterns of school success. According to Stevenson and Baker (1992), Japanese students will have a better opportunity in university if they receive more cram schooling and students from upper income backgrounds gain more from education. This is also the case in Taiwan (Hwang and Sun, 1996).

According to Hwang (1978), family background did not have a major impact on the joint-university entrance examination in Taiwan, which means the poor and rich enjoy the same educational opportunity to be admitted by the universities according to their examination results. However, scholars such as Chen (1988), Hwang (1990) and Wang (1983) argued that the design of the college entrance examination in Taiwan could be fair only because the educational processes from primary to secondary level have screened out students to a great extent so that those who are successful have very similar family backgrounds. Thus, it is

argued that the university entrance examination cannot be a fair system when students' family backgrounds are actually taken into account.

Another area of concern is the educational opportunity for indigenous peoples. Aboriginal peoples comprise 2 percent of the population and their educational opportunities continue to lag behind those of the majority. For example, only 11.03 percent of the indigenous students gain access to higher education whereas 25.70 percent of their majority ethnic group counterparts do so (Council of Indigenous Peoples, Executive Yuan, 2002).

Furthermore, the introduction of market mechanism and deregulation into Taiwanese education reforms since the 1990s have reinforced this trend. As more and more reform programs such as different versions of textbooks and multiple channels of entrance examinations for high school and university have been introduced, the grading competition among schools and families has in turn accelerated. It is argued that Taiwan's old profile as one of the most equitable societies has been altered in the last 10 years. According to the 2001 National Annual Statistics (2002) Taiwanese income discrepancy between the top and bottom 10 percent was 161 times, in contrast to only 39 times one year ago and 19 times in 1991. When comparing the family annual income differences, the gap between the top 20 and bottom 20 percent was 6.39 times in 2003. The number 10 years ago was only 4.97 times, which was interpreted as lesser earnings of the lower-income families compared to 10 years ago. The increasing income inequity has made the dream of upward mobility within one generation less feasible.