

Reconsidering the Intersection of Politics and Education:

: East Asian Perspectives

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Shigeki Izawa (Nagoya University)

In this roundtable, we would like to further our understanding of political influences on education and reconsider the politics of education by inviting young educational philosophers from East Asia. Modern society has fabricated opportunistic fiction regarding the political neutrality of education. However, education has never been politically neutral because it has never been able to escape from the political influences of the times. Instead, the histories of many countries worldwide reveal that education has been used directly or indirectly as a tool to support an existing political regime.

The same can be said regarding the acceptance of educational philosophers such as Comenius, Rousseau, and Dewey and their impact on educational theories and practices in Japan (Sohma et al. 2016). Specifically, the acceptance of John Dewey's educational ideas in Japan—which have continued to inspire, stimulate, and promote the theoretical and practical development of Japan's postwar education—has been directly influenced by the acting political regimes in different periods (Kamidara 1959). Dewey's theories have been interpreted as a progressive or child-centered form of education within the aforementioned context, and they have been interpreted indifferently regarding politics to the point of excluding political issues altogether. This seems to imply, paradoxically, that education has not been unrelated to politics.

Further, the relationship between politics and education has always been contentious. Political intervention in the “internal matters” regarding official knowledge

and the corresponding curriculum is one example that is clearly evidenced by the development of the Japanese course of study and the content of history textbooks. Forty-two historical figures were designated as mandatory learning for elementary school children when the curriculum was revised in 1989, and that list remained unchanged after the latest revision issued in 2017. Selecting the persons to be included in the list caused considerable controversy at the time. Specifically, Togo Heihachiro is widely known as the famous Japanese fleet admiral who lifted Japan to victory in the Russo-Japanese War. Despite his fame, his inclusion as one of the forty-two leading figures to be studied sparked furious debates (Nakano 2005: 102; cf. Murai 1997: 113-128). Years later, memories of the controversy have faded, and the list has managed to garner widespread acceptance. Nevertheless, this has remained a very political issue as it sharply questioned not only our historical awareness but also the political dynamics related to the representation of the nation's history.

After the revision of Japan's Public Office Election Act, young people over the age of eighteen gained the right to vote. New guidelines have established the relationship between politics and education from the perspective of political education such as citizenship education. They shifted the focus regarding educational issues to the kinds of content that should be taught and learned. However, the concept of political education does not imply that the world of education must be replaced by an arena of political struggles. Further to the debates over how to teach and learn politics, a method to maintain a certain degree of distance from politics also needs to be reexamined. Likewise, it is also necessary to evaluate the political nature of political education more critically.

The problem areas of politics and education have intersected many times and seem destined to cross again. While sociopolitical philosophy considers the aims of education in relation to calls for participatory politics and profound discourse regarding global capitalism, educational philosophy examines the new mode of politics with emphasis on moral education or political education. Based on the contexts of educational philosophy in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Japan, this session attempted to critically review the intersection of such politics and education while raising new challenges and methods to approach their relationship going forward.

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Money and Power in *Bad Genius*: a study in the politics of representation

Hektor K. T. Yan (City University of Hong Kong)

Bad Genius (2017, directed by Nattawut Poonpiriya) is a Thai movie—a box office hit in its home country as well as in East Asian countries such as China and Taiwan. While it can be seen as belonging to the genre of a heist movie, *Bad Genius* focuses on a group of young college students who use a number of ingenious cheating techniques to beat the examination system. Using this movie as the main example, this presentation looks at some issues relating to the representation of education.

To begin with, this paper makes the assumption that representations in general involve the exercise of power. To make sense of this claim, I resort to the notion of symbolic annihilation: ‘Representation in the fictional world signifies social existence; absence means symbolic annihilation.’ (George Gerbner and Larry Gross, ‘Living With Television: The Violence Profile’ (1976), p. 182.) If the denial of social existence to groups such as women and ethnic minorities is a problem, one must also question the dominant way education is depicted in popular culture nowadays. For, schooling and education often receive negative portrayals in movies and the media. One may therefore ask: ‘What are the effects on people’s understanding of education if education is constantly discredited in various forms of representations?’

Education in *Bad Genius* is *not* depicted as a progressive measure that enhances social mobility. Instead, education in the movie appears to have no intrinsic value: while students see it as a mere means to obtain academic qualifications, teachers use education as a tool to make money. The main character of the movie, Lynn, is an intelligent girl who excels in the academic subjects. However, her need to fully develop her academic potential hinges on factors other than her intelligence. As Lynn’s father has only a modest income as a teacher, sending Lynn to a prestigious school becomes a financial burden to her family. This lack of money also means that Lynn’s chance to succeed in

the future depends very much on obtaining a scholarship. As the number of scholarships are very limited, the movie highlights the fact that bright students such as Lynn are constantly under the pressure to obtain extra money.

Lynn's financial difficulties eventually lead her to become part of a team of cheating students. As the type of cheating undertaken by this team escalates into complex schemes that involve large number of school pupils, the last section of this presentation centers on cheating as a moral issue. Although the plan designed by Lynn and her friends succeeds in allowing many examination candidates to obtain high marks, Lynn's collaborator Bank is caught by the examination authority during the process and he is expelled from his school. Eventually Lynn decides to confess to the examination authority: she appears to have realized that cheating is morally wrong and does not want to be involved in cheating anymore.

During the roundtable discussion, the focus is mainly on the morality of cheating. Although Lynn's confession may resemble an affirmation of what is morally right, I try to argue that Lynn's confession does not manage to deal with the fundamental cause of the problem, namely, inequality. Lynn's confession does not change the imbalance of power that results from extreme wealth inequality: it only makes her situation deteriorate further. From this perspective, one may say that instead of taking a critical stance towards the status quo, *Bad Genius* re-affirms existing inequality and power relationships.

Language Right and the Learning of Chinese in Postcolonial Hong Kong

Cheuk-Hang Leung (The Chinese University of Hong Kong)

After the change of sovereignty to China in 1997, while the power of English remains unchallenged – thanks to the neo-liberal economic structure, Hong Kong has even witnessed a rapid change of its medium of instruction in teaching Chinese – from using Cantonese to Putonghua (Mandarin) in primary and secondary schools in recent years. It raises concerns of further diminishing the language right of the linguistic majority.

Most people in Hong Kong are native Cantonese speakers (speaking Chinese in the form of Cantonese) and thus it is the majority language of the population. In the educational arena, the medium of instruction in teaching and learning Chinese in primary and secondary schools was Cantonese before 1997. But in recent years there has been a new and dominant trend to switch to Putonghua (Mandarin Chinese) in schools, especially in primary schools. In fact, Cantonese is widely seen as one of the Chinese dialects and de facto the minority language in the context of People's Republic

of China. It gives pragmatic reason for schools administrators and parents to support the switch from Cantonese to Putonghua in learning Chinese in terms of future job opportunities and economic returns of the students. And, indeed, political correctness should also take a role in contributing this situation, as the Chinese central government views the insert of Putonghua into civic and educational arenas as part of the project of nation building of Chineseness.

In the field of political philosophy, language right is now the integral part of theory of justice after the critique of liberalism from communitarianism and multiculturalism in the past two decades. Maintaining language diversity has become essential issue of justice in contemporary democratic countries. People have the rights to use their own language in the public domain and they should expect to attain similar economic endowments through the use of their language in work place. It justifies the preservation of minority language and facilitate its use in public domains, government offices, and work places.

However, language right is different from those conventional liberal rights, such as universal suffrage and religious freedom, for which individual citizen could exercise freely once their entitlements have been granted by the authority. Language right is rather a form of cooperative justice. Language needs to be used in both private and public domains in order to sustain its economic and political influence. Nonetheless, there is always unequal socio-political presence between majority and minority cultures. Minority citizens thus at least bear social and economic costs of not being familiar with majority language in the country.

When it comes to a post-colonial Hong Kong, the language issue becomes much more complicated. Under the political pressure of China, nation-building is the prominent objective for the regime to deploy public policy in Hong Kong. Education is the frontier of such cultural politics battles. Moreover, at the same time Putonghua has been earned the status as the more ‘useful language’, together with English, in current economic climate under the neo-liberal mind set. Upon such context, this presentation examined linguistic justice beyond the two prominent normative models of language – the ‘nation-building’ and ‘language preservation’ under liberalism and explore the possibility of applying and reconstructing postcolonial theory with Hong Kong experience.

Ideology, Collective Memory and National Identity in Schooling: The development of Taiwan history textbooks re-examined

Ren-Jie Lin (Vincent) (National Taiwan University of Sport)

It is always controversial on teaching materials, textbook contents and pedagogies of the subject of history in Taiwan due to its complicated transformation of the politics over the past two hundred years. This research is mainly to re-examine the development of history textbooks in Taiwan after declaring the martial law of 1987, by the perspective of politics of education, with special reference to the concepts of ideology, collective memory and national identity. Therefore, the key question is that how the national identity was constructed in post-1949 Taiwan by shaping collective memories on history textbooks and history teaching implemented by ruling authorities' ideologies on different periods. In the beginning, I re-examine and reflect these concepts and rationales of national identity, collective memory and ideology by academic works of sociology. After this, I do the literature review to explore the transformation of national identity in Taiwan by the related publications and some surveys, such as Taiwan Social Change Survey.

Recently, I begin to expand a new job on this stage. I am collecting different editions of history textbooks of primary and high schools from textbook archives and library of the Center for Textbook Research, National Academy for Educational Research. Because it is a huge job, it estimates that I need to spend several months to finish it. At the same time, I will have my research definitions of national identity and collective memory by focusing on some significant and concrete items, such as patriotism, Chinese and Taiwanese appeared in history textbooks.

On the next stage, I will search these items, sentences and stories, including patriotism, ROC, China, Chinese, Taiwan and Taiwanese in history textbooks and then code them. Then, I will apply the software of Nvivo 11.0 to categorize and generalize the relationship between these key concepts, and argue how government's ideologies were shown by history textbooks on different stages in post-1949 Taiwan. By the huge influence of hidden curriculum by the history teaching, I will analyse how Taiwan's government shaped Taiwanese collective memory to highlight the national identity on different stages by its ideology.

Because of the deeply complicated sovereign status and relationship between China and Taiwan after 1949, the two ruling governments began to frame their people's collective memory and national identity by banking education in schooling, with special reference to history textbooks and history teaching guided directly by government's ideology. Based on the research questions and aims, it could be easily found the significant influence of hidden curriculum from history textbooks and the history

teaching in primary and high school in Taiwan when I support my research report. Simultaneously, it also could be understood the transformation of history textbooks influenced deeply by Taiwan government's diplomatic policies on China.

Conclusion

Masaki Takamiya (Osaka University of Health and Sport Sciences)

How are politics and education intersected? This roundtable considered the question by using examples of Asian countries. Three approaches were contemplated to determine the relationship of politics and education(T. Tamura, M. Matsumoto, & N. Otohe, et al, *Introduction to Political Theory*, Tokyo: Yuhikaku, 2017.): (1) an empirical analysis of political influence in education, (2) inferring educational norms from oughtness in society, and (3) considering what politics in education actually comprises by regarding concepts of conflict and opposition as politics in themselves. If we follow these distinctions, Dr. Yan's suggestion was based on the third approach, albeit with a modification to analyze the politics of representation concerning education. Dr. Leung relied on theories of justice and post-colonial theories to address language rights in Hong Kong. He analyzed the politics of language rights empirically based on normative theories while referencing political theories beyond those normative theories. In essence, he presented a blended method devised from elements of all three approaches. Dr. Lin's contribution was based primarily on the first approach by analyzing the history of educational politics through Taiwanese history textbooks.

All three presenters considered politics within the context of educational phenomena. However, when trying to determine how politics and education are interrelated, we cannot only question education from political perspectives, rather, we must also question politics from educational perspectives. For example, we can ask how people become political subjects from the perspective of human formation, such as the ways in which people acquire the political literacy necessary for acquiring citizenship, etc. We should question education in politics as well as politics in education.